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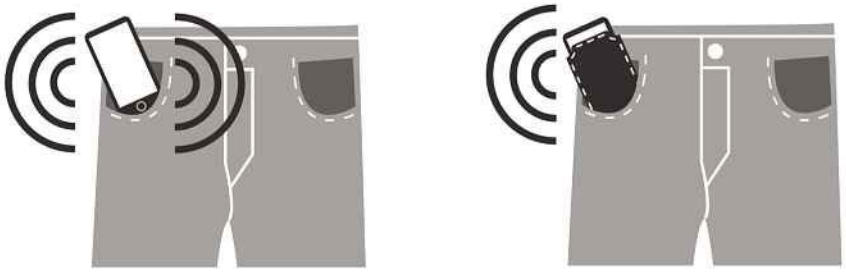

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editorial

Horn dancers and weirdstones

THE MAN WHO INVENTED SHORTS

Welcome to the first issue of 2016, in which we celebrate the best of British weirdness: the fantastic fiction of Alan Garner, men with antlers doing strange dances in deepest Shropshire, a military hero's search for the Garden of Eden, a possible Brit identity behind a celebrated Spanish UFO hoax and a forgotten interwar organisation that managed to fuse the Scouting movement with the teachings of Madame Blavatsky and Aleister Crowley.

The Kibbo Kift, as they were known, were a rum and splendidly diverse bunch: many were drawn from the earnest ranks of vegetarians, naturists, pacifists, and practitioners of alternative spiritual systems, while others were simply seekers after an alternative to the wage slavery and international political uncertainties of the interwar years. There were some notable eccentrics among the Kibbo Kift ranks – and even the odd fortean: "Roland Berrill, known as Deathwatch, was an aristocratic, flamboyantly dressed and wildly bohemian barrister who practised naturism and designed a complex Kibbo Kift system for telling universal time (even patenting a watch that would tell it); later he would design the Royal Fez Moroccan tarot deck and co-found the high IQ society, MENSA. Idrisyn Oliver Evans, known as Blue Swift, was a renaissance man who designed Kibbo Kift educational posters, wrote science fiction and later became a member of the Fortean Society to pursue his interests in UFOs and the Loch Ness monster. He published popular works on geology and history and became the primary translator of the works of Jules Verne into English. Millican Dalton, known as Adventurer, was a pacifist, vegetarian teetotaller and also a pioneering mountaineer, who had given up his former existence as an insurance clerk to live much of his time in a cave in the Lake District. He made all of his own clothes out of rough green leather and claimed to have invented shorts". So writes Dr Annebella Pollen, who describes the esoteric background to the Kibbo Kift in her article (pp34-39). If you want to know more about this fascinating movement, her splendid new book on the subject is highly recommended.

"I DON'T CARE IF YOU ARE THE CHIEF DRUID, YOU'RE NOT CELEBRATING THE RESURRECTION OF NATURE IN HERE"

ERRATA

Perhaps we were getting tired in the run-up to the festive season, but the gremlins were out in force for our Christmas issue.

FT335:16: Arthur Burton of Maidstone, Kent, wrote in to point out a particularly daft error. "The final piece on the archæology page, 'Child-killing Carthaginians', ends with "respect shown for children who had died before or soon after death'" Now I may well be reading a fairly obvious statement wrongly, or it may refer to some particularly obscure branch of Zen, but it makes little sense I'm afraid. My regards to Fortean Towers for making me chuckle this afternoon though!" The line should have read "…before or soon after birth".

FT335:26: Bobby Zodiac pointed out a geographical glitch in this issue's 'Flying Saucery' column. The 'Sheer lunacy?' story about astronaut Edgar Mitchell and UFO sightings referred to "Mexico's White Sands nuclear testing grounds". Of course, White Sands is in New Mexico, USA.

FT335:46: Discussing various mysterious vanishings, Paul Sieveking mentioned the case of Isaac Martin, noting that: "Huge numbers of people had been emigrating from West Virginia following a terrible drought and harsh winter," and suggesting that "the most likely explanation is that Isaac Martin had abandoned his farm and headed west in the 'exodus fever'". Theo Paijmans emailed to remind us that: "I solved that one in back in May 2010 in 'Mysterious Vanishings' in **FT262:30.** He was found hanging in a tree near his house".

FT335:62: A mysterious line of asterisks appeared in Leah Moore's review of *Future Shock! The Story of 2000AD*. Clearly, someone was asleep at the subbing wheel that day. This is what Leah meant to say: "Watching a newly elected Tory government crush the power to protest in both industry and politics, *2000AD* gave them a place to vent their dissatisfaction under the cover of a genre deemed fantastical and a medium dismissed as juvenile".

DAVID R SUTTON

BOB RICKARD

PAUL SIEVEKING

Why fortean?
Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!
SEE PAGE 78

★★★★

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strangedays

Brompton time machine

Is a west London cemetery home to a Victorian teleportation chamber?

The key to the thick bronze door of the Courtoy mausoleum in Brompton Cemetery, west London, went missing in the 1970s. Ray Godson and Stephen Coates are both keen to see inside the imposing granite monument. Mr Godson would like to pay his respects to Hannah Courtoy (1784-1849), his great-great-grandmother, who is interred in the tomb with two of her three daughters; while Mr Coates, a film composer, wants to investigate a long-held legend that the tomb is a Victorian time machine. He hopes to be whisked back to ancient Egypt or, preferably, to emerge from the tomb as a younger version of himself. He has organised a storytelling event in the cemetery on 20 December 2015 to raise enough money to buy a new key. What is required, he said, is "a big, copper, *Lord of the Rings* job".

The time machine legend is based on a mixture of historical fact, supposition and unfettered fancy. Hannah Courtoy, described by the Friends of Brompton Cemetery as a "mysterious society woman with fabulous wealth" and rumoured to have been a royal mistress, was born Hannah Peters, but never actually married. She was most likely acquainted with Joseph Bonomi (1796-1878), a well-known sculptor and Egyptologist whose relatively modest gravestone lies close to the Courtoy mausoleum. Hannah might have funded some of his Egyptian expeditions, and rumour has it that he designed her mausoleum, an idea given some credence by its ancient Egyptian architectural features and the hieroglyphics inscribed on the walls of the tomb and on

TERRI PENGILLEY

ABOVE: Stephen Coates stands in front of the tomb of Hannah Courtoy.

The mystery won't be solved until a new key opens the lock

Bonomi's own headstone. Bonomi also designed the entrance to Abney Park Cemetery in Stoke Newington, north London (in collaboration with William Hosking), built in Egyptian style with hieroglyphics signifying the Abode of the Mortal Part of Man. Bonomi married Jesse Martin, daughter of the apocalyptic painter John Martin, and became curator of Sir John Soane's Museum in Holborn, central London.

The Victorians were fascinated with the idea of time travel, speculating that the pharaohs might have discovered its secret; might Bonomi have learned of it during one of his expeditions? If he did, he could have passed it on to his business partner, a mysterious London inventor of naval weaponry called Samuel Alfred Warner (c.1793-1853), who is also buried in Brompton Cemetery. Warner's inventions included an invisible shell, or, as Mr Coates puts it, "a bomb that could be teleported a short distance – a kind of psychic torpedo". The Royal Navy was so intrigued by Warner's metaphysical armament that it allowed him to stage several demonstrations. At least one ship was destroyed during these trials, none of which offered conclusive proof of the weapon's efficacy.

The connection with Warner and his "psychic torpedo" has convinced Mr Coates that the Courtoy mausoleum is more likely to be a teleportation chamber than a straightforward time machine. He posits that it was part of a network of chambers erected in the "magnificent seven" cemeteries that were built in a ring around central London in the 19th century. An eighth mausoleum resembling the Courtoy tomb is located in Montmartre Cemetery in Paris, so if the teleportation theory is correct, the network might be used to pop over the Channel as well as whiz around London in a split second.

The time machine legend received a significant boost in 2003 when the Scottish musician Drew Mulholland – who records under the name Mount Vernon Astral Temple – put a photograph of the Courtoy mausoleum on the cover of his album *Musick That Destroys Itself*. The doctored image shows an eerie vortex emanating from the doorway of the tomb. "I got fascinated by the idea [of the time machine]," said Mulholland, who is currently a composer in residence at Glasgow University. "The notion that it develops its own energy or current…"

Supporters of the legend claim that the Courtoy mausoleum is the only tomb in Brompton Cemetery for which there are no plans and no key; but cemetery guide Robert Stephenson, whose passionate expertise has earned him the nickname "Dr Death", says that several other prominent tombs in the cemetery have no plans. The mystery won't be solved until a new key is inserted in the lock and the heavy bronze door swings open. "Perhaps we'll have an auction to decide who gets to step inside first," said Mr Coates. "It will be interesting to see what happens to them." *neovictoriansteampunk.com, independent.co.uk, 12 Dec 2015.*

BLUESTONE BOMBSHELL
New research suggests surprise previous life for Stonehenge
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MODERN MIRACLES
Bleeding communion wafers and weeping statues
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FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS
Flash-frozen fish, sex-changing yew trees and a case of SHC
PAGE 22

The Conspirasphere

Strange tales from the Carpathians link a Sphinx simulacrum, secret tunnels, government cover-ups and a Romanian stargate. NOEL ROONEY reports...

Here's a story that has everything: ancient mysteries, a hint of alien involvement, weird government departments, conniving masons, interfering Bilderbergers, and all this wrapped in a location whose very name whispers mystery.

The Bucegi Mountains are part of the Carpathians, in Romania, on the borders of Transylvania. The area was once a centre of power, both sacred and secular, for the Dacians, a culture that thrived from somewhere around 4,000 years ago (and perhaps earlier, if evidence such as the Tantaria tablets are taken into account) until its eventual destruction at the hands of the Romans.

In 1900, photographs first began to emerge of an intriguing, apparently natural phenomenon in the mountains: the figure of a sphinx. If this is a natural simulacrum, then it is an uncanny one; it bears a striking resemblance to the Egyptian original. But the sphinx is not the only fascinating formation adorning these mountains; there are a number of structures that may or may not be carved by human hands.

In 2003, these amazing features were soundly trumped by the story of an even stranger discovery in the Bucegi Mountains. Rumours began to circulate of a series of tunnels and a huge chamber carved deep into the mountains. It was suggested that the US military was involved in the discovery, and that it was related to a similar structure in Iraq, which some online commentators were calling an alien stargate.

Department Zero of the Romanian secret service, which apparently deals with occult security matters (I know, they could have chosen a more appropriate number, but perhaps there just aren't another 665 departments) was soon on the case. As the rumour mill ground on, it was whispered that the tunnels had been explored, and the chamber had turned out to be a repository of advanced knowledge, a holographic museum of science and history, scaled for giants, and complete with an invisible barrier lethal to intruders; not all intruders obviously, or you and I wouldn't know all this.

Then the Bilderbergers sent an envoy to threaten the Romanian government and force them to cover up the discovery. The US government colluded in the cover-up (maybe they were peeved that someone else had a stargate, and one that didn't require all-out war to access), and that might have been that, but the story refused to go away. You will find references to it (most of them a touch addled, I admit) on many websites dedicated to exposing the machinations of the powers that be.

If nothing else, the Bucegi story is another good example of how areas that were deemed sacred and mysterious by our ancestors continue to accrue mysteries over time. This clustering of high strangeness is worthy of a fortean monograph in its own right.

www.bibliotecapleyades.net/ciencia/historia_humanidad07.htm

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EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

MAN SEES JESUS IN HIS CHICKEN DINNER

ABC News, — Nov 2014.

ARRESTED OVER LETHAL BANANA

D.Telegraph, 27 Nov 2014.

Swan rues 'putrid' year

The Age (Melbourne), 5 Dec 2014.

MALIGN TUMOURS BID FOR NHS CARE

Morning Star, 7 Nov 2014.

Magpie escapes jail term

Adelaide Advertiser, 20 Nov 2014.

Jesus celebrates 40 years of women

Cherwell (Oxford), 28 Nov 2014.

Police union wants board chair's head

Toronto Star, 6 Dec 2014.

WEIRD NEW YEAR

1

1 The Chanctonbury Ring Morris Men lead a procession to the orchard during the Apple Howling ceremony at Old Mill Farm in Bolney, West Sussex. In this ritual, performed on the first Saturday in January, villagers surround the oldest and largest tree in the orchard, evil spirits are driven out and good spirits are encouraged to produce a bountiful apple crop for the following year's cider. **PHOTO: PETER MACDIARMID/GETTY IMAGES**

2 A man bathes in the Dnieper River in Ukraine for Epiphany on 19 January. The ritual celebrates the baptism of Jesus for Orthodox Christians, who themselves plunge into the icy water to symbolically wash away their sins on a day when it is believed that all water becomes holy. **PHOTO: BRENDAN HOFFMAN/GETTY IMAGES**

3 The Haxey Fool watches the game of Haxey Hood at Haxey Village, Doncaster, on 6 January. The origins of the game, which is a bit like a large rugby scrum, go back to the 14th century, when according to local tradition, Lady de Mowbray was out riding and lost her silk hood, which was blown about the fields with farm workers in hot pursuit. **PHOTO: CHRISTOPHER FURLONG/GETTY IMAGES**

4 Masked men or "Vijanera" parade during the carnival in Silio, in the northern Spanish province of Cantabria, on 4 January. The masquerade involvies some 60 characters (all male) and aims to banish the old year and clear the way for the next one. **PHOTO: CESAR MANSO/AFP/GETTY IMAGES**

2

3
JASPER CONRAN
JASPER CONRAN

4

SIDELINES...

PLUMMETING COW

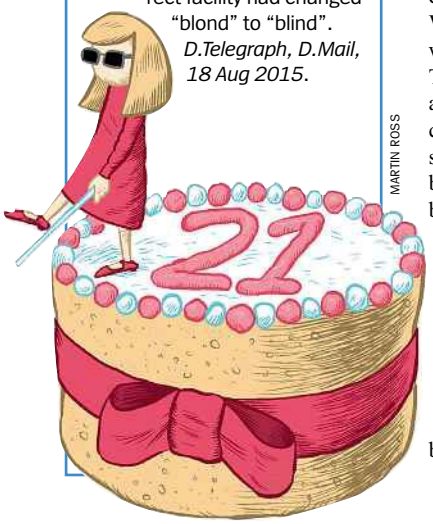
As a Frenchman drove his stepson to school near the town of Perthus on the border with Spain in the Pyrenees, a 500kg (80 stone) cow fell from the sky and landed on the car's bonnet, one of its horns piercing the windscreen. The cow had been walking along a cliff high above the road and lost its balance. The cow perished, but driver and stepson escaped unhurt – but severely rattled. *thelocal.fr, 2 Oct 2015.*

UPSIDE OF PLAGUE

Even the Black Death had a silver lining, according to Cambridge historian Robert Tombs. Following the death of around 1.5 million people in England in 1348-50, serfs gained freedom, fewer people competed for work and land, and living standards rose to heights not exceeded until the 1880s, and leisure time not equalled until the 1960s. Taverns developed from mere ale suppliers to become recognisable pubs – places for games and socialising. *D.Telegraph, D.Mail, 25 June 2015.*

A CAKE MIX

A mother was stunned when her daughter Laura's 21st birthday cake arrived with a girl holding a white cane on top of it. Marie Seggie, 52, of Coatbridge, Lanarkshire, had texted a friend and asked her to make the cake with "a wee blond girl on top". She failed to notice her iPhone's autocorrect facility had changed "blond" to "blind". *D.Telegraph, D.Mail, 18 Aug 2015.*



MARTIN ROSS

Inventing countries

Micro-nations continue to proliferate in the 21st century

WILLIAM EDWARDS / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Princess Emily wears her royal crown at all times and designed the country's flag, but hasn't actually visited the "Kingdom of North Sudan" yet.

● Jeremiah Heaton, a father of three from Virginia, has claimed a small patch of Africa, because his daughter Emily wants to be a princess. "Being a father, I knew she was serious in her request," he said. "I researched pieces of land that were unclaimed and was fortunate to discover it." To celebrate Emily's seventh birthday he travelled to what locals call Bir Tawil to make Emily's "dreams come true". When he arrived on 16 June 2014 after a 14-hour trek across the desert, he planted the flag his daughter had designed in the ground and insisted his claim was legitimate. The "Kingdom of North Sudan", as he calls it, is 800 square miles (2,000 km^2) of arid desert between Egypt and Sudan. When spoken of in association with the neighbouring Hala'ib Triangle, it is sometimes referred to as the Bir Tawil Triangle, despite its quadrilateral shape. Its *terra nullius* status results from a discrepancy between the straight political boundary separating Egypt and Sudan established in 1899, and the irregular administrative boundary established in 1902. Egypt asserts the political boundary, and Sudan asserts the administrative boundary, with the result that the Hala'ib Triangle is claimed by both, and Bir Tawil by neither. It is believed to be the only territory on Earth of any significant size that is both habitable and unclaimed.

Heaton sent official requests to both Egypt and Sudan; but at the time of the report neither had responded, so he then appealed to the African Union for support. Princess Emily, as she is now called by her family, has ordered her new land to become a centre for agriculture. She wears her royal crown at all times and says it's "very cool" being a princess, but she doesn't know when she'll visit her country. Egypt, Sudan and the United Nations will have to recognise the Kingdom of North Sudan before she's officially the daughter of a king. *BBC News, (Sydney) D.Telegraph, 15 July 2014.*

● Another ambiguous territory is a tiny secluded area where verdant forest meets white sand on a western bank of the Danube, named on maps as Gornja Siga. On 13 April 2015 Vít Jedlicka, a Eurosceptic Czech politician, declared it the "Free Republic of Liberland", asserting it had never been claimed properly by either Croatia or Serbia. A bilateral dispute first arose in 1947, but resolution was delayed as both countries were subsumed in Yugoslavia. Liberland has its own flag, which features an eagle and a sun, a constitution, and a motto – "To live and let live". A national anthem was being composed by a Czech rapper. "We are part of a great libertarian movement that is growing around the world," said Mr Jedlicka, who is Liberland's President.

Around 120 would-be citizens arrived on 1 May 2015 for Liberland's first Liberty Day, bringing food, beer, and "all necessary equipment for comfortable survival in nature". As yet, there are no houses on the 7km^2 (2.7 sq mile) sliver of territory, which is larger than the Vatican City State and Monaco. The only signs of life are a single dilapidated building, pheasants, deer, the odd wild boar, and eagles overhead. Around 300,000 people around the world have applied for honorary citizenship, offering expertise in areas from solar power and telecoms to town planning and coin minting. Liberland's only stipulations are that applicants respect individual rights, opinions and private property, and have no criminal record or Nazi or Communist party background. Its founders dream of building a free-market economy – a sort of Balkan Hong Kong, with a large population living in yet-to-be-built skyscrapers. Trouble is, Liberland has not been recognised by any other country. *Guardian, 25 April; D.Telegraph, 1 May 2015.*

● Less than a month later, another new country was declared. A group of Polish tourists to Slovenia, including Piotr Wawrzynkiewicz, were told by locals that there was an unclaimed 100m^2 (1,070ft^2) strip of land near the town of Metlika, about 30 miles (48km) west of Zagreb, Croatia's capital. They thought it was the perfect location for their dreamed-of micro-nation of Enclava, but the Slovenian foreign ministry was quick to say it was part of their territory. Wawrzynkiewicz and friends then shifted their attention to a supposedly unclaimed strip of land adjoining the Danube not far from Liberland. The idea behind Enclava is "to create a place, where everyone, regardless of skin colour, religion or nationality, will be able to express

2011 GAMMA-RAPHO / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Leonard George Casley, or Prince Leonard, leader of the Hutt River Province.

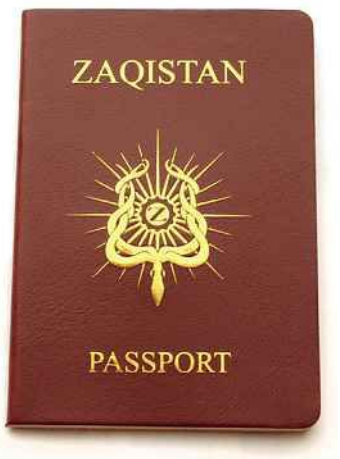
their opinions, study for free, and earn money without worrying about taxes," Wawrzynkiewicz said. *[AFP] 25 May 2015.*

● The Hutt River Province, Australia's oldest micro-nation, may soon enter a new era, as its aged monarch considers abdication. Based on an agricultural property 300 miles (480km) north of Perth, the Principality of Hutt River was born out of a farming family's quarrel with the authorities. Through a series of legal manoeuvres, Leonard George Casley – who calls himself Prince Leonard – founded the Principality in 1970 in response to the Western Australia Government's wheat production quotas, which would have allowed only a fraction of his farm's crop to go to market. "If we would have accepted that quota, it would have made the farm at that time valueless," Prince Leonard said. The 45-year-old principality, based near Northampton and not legally recognised by the Australian Government, has its own flag and official seal. It attracts tourists from around the globe, who make the pilgrimage to have their passports stamped and purchase the local currency, the Hutt River dollar.

In 1977, following repeated demands for payments from the Australian Taxation Office (ATO), the Principality declared war on Australia. It withdrew several days later and is now treated by the ATO as a non-resident of Australia which does not pay taxes but is believed to proffer annual 'gifts' to the local shire. Prince Leonard, who turned 90 on 27 August 2015, said poor health may soon prompt his retirement, but he has yet to decide which of his seven children will succeed him. The Principality has a crown committee made up of Prince Leonard's three daughters, who could be called upon to determine their father's successor. One of his sons, Prince Graeme, said any succession might still be years away. Prince Leonard intends to further develop an educational shrine that he dedicates to his wife, Princess Shirley, who died in 2013. *ABC News, 6 Sept 2015.*

● Zaqistan, officially "The Republic of Zaqistan" was founded in Box Elder County, Utah, by Zachary Landsberg, 30, a sculptor living in Brooklyn. He bought the four-acre property on eBay in August 2005 for $610 (£400), and visits once or twice a year. It is extremely remote – around 18 miles (29km) on dirt tracks from the nearest highway and then two miles hiking through the desert. 'Zaq' explained that "Zaqistan is some coordinates on a piece of paper, it's a national identity, it's a de facto sovereign nation." He has installed sculptures, a supply bunker and a border patrol gate, and sells passports on his website for $40 (£27). He pays property taxes to the county, though he refers to them as 'tributes' to keep relations friendly. The Republic, in the Newfoundland Evaporation Basin of the Great Salt Lake, has a red and yellow flag and a national motto: "Something for Nothing". It has an embassy in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and celebrates Independence Day on 19 November. *D.Mail online, 21 Oct; NY Daily News, 1 Nov 2015*.

See also **FT98:34-38** ("How to start your own country"), **FT160:12** (Ladonia created by Lars Viks), **FT242:22-23** (Molossia and Forvik), and *An Atlas of Countries That Don't Exist* by Nick Middleton, reviewed **FT335:60**).



PHOTOS: TH REPUBLIC OF ZAQISTAN

ABOVE: Zaqistan was founded by Brooklyn sculptor Zachary Landsberg. Is it a Sovereign nation or a piece of conceptual art?

SIDELINES...

MUSEUM SURPRISE

Following a CT scan, a pickled bat stored in the vaults of London's Natural History Museum for the last 30 years has been recognised as a previously unknown species, and named Francis's Woolly Horseshoe Bat (*Rhinolophus francisi*) after Charles Francis, who collected the specimen in Malaysia in 1983. *BBC News, 31 Oct 2015.*

PUZZLING PACKAGE

Police in Trafford, Greater Manchester, were called on 19 July after a walker pulled a suspicious package from the Bridgewater Canal. He thought it might be a dead animal because it had a "strong odour" and was "leaking white fluid"; but it turned out to be a number of coconuts tightly wrapped in a duvet. *Manchester Eve. News online, 19 July 2015.*

BULLSEYE!

Three Irish sisters from Cloonfad, County Roscommon, all gave birth at Mayo General Hospital in Castlebar, County Mayo, on 1 September. Mairead FitzPatrick had a boy named Thomas Óg at 03.25am; Joeline Godfrey had a girl named Sorcha at about 11:00am, and Bernie Ward had a boy called Phelim at about 8:30pm. A fourth sister, Christina Murray, a maternity patient at the same hospital, was days overdue. *BBC News, 3 Sept 2015.*

POSSUM TAIL MYSTERY

Over the weekend of 24/25 October, thousands of "fresh-looking" possum tails were found scattered along highways and minor roads in the Auckland and Northland regions of New Zealand. One motorist did a rough count and tallied about 15 tails per kilometre. Local authorities said they have no idea whether the tail-dumping was accidental or part of a protest. Accidental?! *BBC News, 26 Oct 2015.*

GET OUTTA EAR

Doctors removed 25 baby cockroaches that had hatched in a man's ear in Zhejiang province, China. *Sun, 28 Oct 2015.*

SIDELINES...

LEGEND COMES TO LIFE

Two years ago Wang Kaiyu bought a pair of 'puppies' while travelling on China's southern border with Vietnam. He raised them at his home in Maguan County, Yunnan Province, and it was only when he was sent a promotional notice by the local wildlife authorities that he discovered they were in fact Asian black bears, a protected species. They were taken to a wild animal rescue centre for breeding. A month later, the story had changed: Wang Kaiyu was now Wang Ping, and he kept the 'puppies' in Xichang, Sichuan. *mirror.co.uk, 3 July; Metro, 28 July 2015.*

A BOAR ADVENTURE

Glen Dobbs and his friend Adrian were out fishing in a tournament in Whitianga, New Zealand, on 4 July when they encountered a wild boar swimming a few kilometres off the coast of the Coromandel town. Luckily, they had a solid hull because they hit the boar doing about 15-20 knots. They hauled the tired 140lb (63kg) animal out of the water, before putting it out of its misery with a fishing knife. *nzherald.co.nz, 8 July 2015.*

AWAY IN A MANGER

A mother abandoned her son in a manger at a New York church. A caretaker found the crying baby boy swaddled in towels in a Nativity scene inside the Holy Child Jesus Church in Queens. The baby's mother was tracked down but will not face charges, because she left him in a place where he would be found quickly. *D.Telegraph, 27 Nov 2015.*

MARTIN ROSS

LYING LOW

'MURDERED' WOMAN TURNS UP AFTER 31 YEARS, WHILE OTHERS ESCAPE MODERN LIFE BY HEADING FOR THE HILLS

TATYANA MAKEYEVA / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: A deserter lived for 11 years in woods outside Petropavlosk-Kamchatsky.

● Police in Russia's Far East have found a man who deserted the army 11 years ago and has been hiding in the woods ever since. The unnamed 30-year-old was wanted by police after disappearing from his post on the Kamchatka peninsula in 2004, a year after being conscripted. He was subsequently declared dead after family members 'identified' his body in the months after he deserted, and the case was closed. However, officers finally caught up with him after residents of a local village called them about a "suspicious inhabitant" who had settled nearby. "The man told police he had built a small house from old construction materials near the city of Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky," said a police spokeswoman. "He was collecting berries and mushrooms and scrap metal, worked at a pig farm and went fishing to earn his living." The local interior ministry said the man stayed in the Kamchatka region and didn't attempt to return home or contact his family during his 11 years in hiding. While he has now been detained, it was not clear if he faced punishment because so much time had passed since the original offence. *BBC News, 30 Nov 2015.*

It was not clear how the heavily bearded man had found food

● A Spanish doctor who disappeared from his home in Seville in 1996 was discovered by mushroom pickers in early November, living in a makeshift shelter in the Maremma region of southern Tuscany, an area of rolling hills and thick forests near the island of Elba that is home to healthy populations of deer and wild boar. He had three jerry cans for holding rainwater and a tarpaulin that he had strung between the trees to give him shelter. It was not clear how the ragged and heavily bearded man had managed to find food. He was apparently able to gather bits of flotsam and jetsam while scouting along beaches on the Tuscan coast, about an hour's walk from his hideout. Some people speculated that he found a way to cultivate food, while others suggested he has survived thanks to midnight raids on dustbins at the edge of nearby towns such as Scarlino.

Carlos Sanchez Ortiz de Salazar, 45, allowed the mushroom pickers to photograph a few tattered documents, including a university library card. He told them that he had been living in the woods for most of the last two decades. However, apparently unsettled by being discovered, he then vanished into the forest again and has not been seen since.

The mushroom pickers passed on the photographs to missing person organisations, which tracked down Sanchez's family. A graduate in medicine born in Bilbao, he is believed to have been suffering from severe depression when he fled Spain at the age of 26. His family had given up all hope and in 2010 he was formally declared to be presumed dead. His family celebrated the fact that he is still alive and travelled to Italy in the hope of being reunited, but failed to locate him. While Italy is densely populated in parts, it has vast areas of mountains and forests in which a person could conceivably live without being detected. In fact the depopulation of rural areas means

ABOVE: The makeshift shelter in which Carlos Sanchez Ortiz de Salazar was found.

ABOVE LEFT: Petra Pazsitka, seen in a police image from 1984. **ABOVE RIGHT**: George Foggerdy is rescued after days in the outback.

that forested areas are increasing. The abandonment of farmland has led to the re-establishment of forests on a vast scale. More than a third of Italy is now covered in trees. *D.Telegraph online, The Local (Spain), 9 Nov 2015.*

● A woman who vanished 31 years ago and was assumed dead after a man confessed to her murder has emerged alive and well after arranging her own disappearance. Petra Pazsitka, a 24-year-old computer science student from the northern German city of Braunschweig, was last seen on 26 July 1984 after boarding a bus supposedly on the way to her parents' house. When a comprehensive manhunt drew a blank, police launched a murder enquiry, suspecting that the same person who had killed a 14-year-old girl a year earlier had struck again. In 1985 Günter K, 19, was arrested and confessed to the murder of the teenager. In 1987 he also admitted to killing Pazsitka, who was officially declared dead in 1989 – even though Günter K later withdrew his confession.

On 11 September 2015, Pazsitka, now aged 55 and calling herself "Mrs Schneider", was discovered by police investigating a burglary at her flat in Düsseldorf. She confessed her real name after being asked for identification, showing them her old, out-of-date ID card. She had spent the last 11 years in Düsseldorf, previously living in several other cities in western Germany. She had somehow got by for three decades without a social security card, drivers' licence, passport or bank account. Police said that she "cannot be made criminally liable" for her disappearance because she never used false papers. She declined to explain why she had disappeared and said she wanted no contact with her family or the public. *independent.co.uk, 26 Sept; Sunday Telegraph, 27 Sept 2015.*

● An Australian man lost for six days in the Outback was found alive, surviving in the 99°F (37°C) heat without water and by eating black ants. Wearing only a T-shirt, shorts, a cap and flip-flops, Reginald George Foggerdy, 62, disappeared while pursuing a feral camel in a remote area of the Great Victoria Desert in Western Australia. Police trackers found him sitting under a tree on 13 October around 9 miles (14km) from where he became lost. His family described him as an experienced bushman but have now told him to buy a satellite phone. Foggerdy, a retired miner, apparently became disorientated in the fierce heat. He was discovered extremely dehydrated and a bit delusional, but after a paramedic gave him fluid intravenously he perked up. Supt Andy Greatwood praised his "fantastic" skills, saying that while more details of how he coped were likely to emerge, "most people would not have survived". [AP] *13 Oct; Metro, (Queensland) Courier-Mail, 14 Oct 2015.*

● Five gold miners were rescued in Tanzania after surviving for up to 41 days underground by eating cockroaches and frogs and drinking drips of muddy water. A total of 20 miners became trapped on 5 October after a shaft filled with sand in an abandoned mine in the Shinyanga region, some 500 miles west of Dares Salaam. Fourteen escaped, but six remained trapped. On 16 November five were brought out in what officials described as a 'miracle'. One other man was discovered dead. *D.Telegraph, 18 Nov 2015.*

● An Italian couple who reportedly wanted to escape the pressures of modern life have been found on a remote mountainside after surviving in the wild for six months. The man, 50, and his 24-year-old girlfriend left their homes in Trieste last spring and headed into the hills. Shortly after they arrived, the unnamed woman gave birth to a baby girl, Amina. The couple left their daughter with relations and continued living in the wild "to experience nature and how things used to be".

Residents began to circulate rumours about a "strange couple" living on the mountain. On 2 November forest rangers and police found them huddled together on a bed of sticks under an overhanging rock where they had been living for two weeks, surviving off berries and relying on just their sleeping bags and a small fire to keep warm. A ranger said they were "healthy and in good spirits", despite being "a bit cold and hungry". They were persuaded to come down to a local town, but said thy wanted to return to the wild. *D.Telegraph, 5 Nov 2015.*

SIDELINES...

'IMPOSSIBLE' HAND PRINT

On 16 October, clear prints of a finger and thumb were discovered inside a heavy glass case holding an Egyptian mummy in Torquay Museum, Devon. "The case had not been opened for seven years and the last time it was opened it took seven men," said museum keeper Carl Smith. "It was impossible for it to be opened by someone else." The mummy is a young boy named Psamtek who died around 600 BC, but the casket is nearly a millennium older. *(Torquay) Herald Express online, 18 Oct 2015.*

RED LETTER DAY

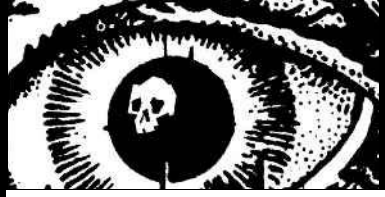
Around 2pm on 1 October, agricultural workers in Kanagal village in the Mysuru district of the southwestern Indian state of Karnataka saw a "humanoid figure" come towards them from a red spacecraft that emerged from the clouds and landed about 500ft (150m) away. It allegedly took off just seconds after landing and there were flashes and sparks around it. Investigator TA Manjunatha said the female witnesses had never heard of UFOs or aliens, so were probably not lying. *journaltelegraph.com, 5 Oct 2015.*

ROAMING REPTILE

A 4ft (1.2m)-long yellow anaconda was found lying next to a fence in West Pilton Bank, Edinburgh, on 1 August. Street cleaner Gordon Fraser coaxed the dehydrated South American reptile into a box and took it back to his depot before calling the Scottish SPCA. Its provenance was a mystery. *BBC News, 6 Aug 2015.*

MAJOR HANDICAP

New Zealander Nigel Richards, 48, who speaks no French, won the French-language Scrabble World championship by memorising an entire French dictionary in the nine weeks before the tournament in Louvin, Belgium, defeating a rival from francophone Gabon in West Africa. He got a standing ovation. *D.Telegraph, 22 July 2015.*



MATT PATTINSON

GHOSTWATCH

ALAN MURDIE casts a sceptical eye over some ghostly encounters of the sexual kind

ABOVE: Accounts of sexually predatory incubi and succubi long predate modern sexually active spooks and have been linked to the classic 'Night Hag' experience.

THE SPECTROPHILIACS

Early in November I was intrigued to receive, via the Ghost Club, an urgent request for help from journalist Scarlett Russell, attached to 'Femail', the women's section of the *Daily Mail*, who was "looking to interview a woman who has had consensual sex with a ghost". She explained, "This is actually a thing apparently; it is called Spectrophilia". All this was news to me, but the *Mail* was earnestly seeking such a woman, and willing to pay her for sharing any such astonishing story, to provide "what would be a lovely, positive and colourful feature in the *Daily Mail*."

Probably I was the wrong person to ask. Apart from wondering just what Ms Russell really thought the Ghost Club was all about, I immediately expressed my doubts as to my ability to assist with such a request. As it happened, I was actually giving a lecture the following week entitled, "The erotic element in physical phenomena" at Senate House Library, examining certain sexual elements and themes identifiable in historic séances involving entranced physical mediums in experiments between 1873 and 1933.

"IF YOU'RE COLD AND SAD, CLIMB INTO BED AND I'LL CUDDLE YOU"

However, this was far removed from the *Mail's* focus of interest, women currently claiming to be engaging in sexual relations with ghosts in daily life in 21st century Britain.

Concerning 'spectrophilia', I had never encountered a credible claim of consensual relations with any apparition and along with many other researchers, I hold strong reservations about the whole idea being anything other than folklore. Regarding a handful of ghost encounters claiming a sexual element I have heard personally, I unfortunately concluded that these came from attention-seeking individuals or arose with people who had undergone traumatic childhood experiences and abuse. In particular, there was nothing consensual about their claimed experiences and several were understandably distressed and anxious about the incidents, whatever their origin.

More pertinently, back in 2001 I had followed up a story which had circulated in UFO and apparitional literature for some 20 years involving alleged consensual sexual relations between a Colombian farmer named Anibale Quintero and a group of female alien entities which supposedly took place during a nocturnal thunderstorm in 1976. The story was widely cited in UFO/entity experience literature, being a favourite of the late Hilary Evans, who proposed that Quintero's experience was an hallucination triggered by electromagnetic pollution and stimulation of his temporal lobes by electromagnetism. As I happened to be going to Colombia, Hilary Evans kindly provided me with references for the story that originally appeared in the American magazine *UFO Report* (1977) vol.5, no.l, for November 1977, citing an edition of the Colombian magazine *Vea* from 1976 as the source.

With this information I was able to make further enquiries at the Central Library in Bogota, Colombia, in July 2001, and spoke

to some Colombian ufologists. Unfortunately, the library did not hold a complete run of this now defunct magazine; nor did the librarians consider it even worth preserving. It transpired that *Vea* was notorious for running wholly invented stories of a sensational nature and Colombian ufologists had dismissed the story entirely. My own conclusion was that "no credibility can be attached to any aspect of this story of sexual contact between hairy female aliens and a human being, whether as a UFO report, an 'entity encounter' or a bizarre hallucination triggered by electromagnetism affecting the brain. Not surprisingly, it's a hoax." (see *Journal* of the SPR 2002 vol.66, no.868)

Since the *Mail* was after my views on 'spectrophilia', I readily gave an opinion, e-mailing back: "I am not aware of any credible claimed case of anyone having consensual sex with a ghost and would consider this was more a topic for the psychiatrist rather than for psychical researchers. Indeed, I think the Royal College of Psychiatry might be a better starting point for claims of this nature as (hoaxers aside) anyone desiring consensual sex with the dead is frankly going to be an abnormal individual."

Certainly, such stories as do exist in the annals of psychical research do not inspire confidence, as indicated with claims of intimate contact in two apparitional cases reported to the SPR as long ago as 1978. The investigator, the late Brian Nisbet, recorded: "*Mrs. W* (1)[stated] "the next time the thing stood beside my bed I said to it (and this is where I still wonder if I'm sane but I now believe I am), 'If you're cold and sad, as you appear to be, climb into bed and I'll cuddle you.' It did exactly that. I felt it but never saw anything and after a little while everything came back to normal. I nicknamed this one, 'Fred'."

Another "much more explicit account" was obtained from a 'Mr M (2)' who described the apparition of his ex-wife visiting him, but Nisbet noted "it is obvious that he was in a semi-dream condition". In fact, enquiries established the ex-wife was still alive! (Source: *Journal* of the SPR vol.50, 1979-1980).

The classic example of this distressing kind of haunting was the Thornton Heath Poltergeist of 1938 investigated by Dr Nandor Fodor and the subject of a book in 1960 *On the Trail of the Poltergeist*. The manifestations centred on a 35-year-old woman, 'Mrs Forbes', who was surrounded by poltergeist activity. Applying psychoanalytic techniques of dream analysis and interpreting symbols, Fodor found a wide variety of meanings in the phenomena, symptoms and nightmares experienced by her and her family. She had dreams of vampiric attacks, a fear of churches, of certain men (particularly those wearing glasses) and being near trees. She hallucinated smells of violets. Fodor concluded behind these symptoms and the poltergeist was a sexual neurosis occasioned by a trauma. Although discovering that violets had been used in her wedding flowers, he believed the root causes lay not in her marriage but in childhood memories of abuse. What Fodor considered significant clues arose in the course of therapy, and on a visit to Coulsdon Mrs Forbes experienced a spontaneous vision of a man with an evil expression. From this he concluded she had suffered an incident of serious sexual violence during childhood in the same area.

Concluding my summary, I informed the *Mail* that in the 75 years since there had been a number of cases of persons being sexually assaulted by what they interpreted as ghosts, usually revealed in a therapeutic setting, but I concluded: "These do not really fit the criteria of the feature you envisage".

I rather thought (indeed hoped!) that would be the end of the matter, but it did not prove the case. On 13 November 2015 the *Daily Mail* duly ran a feature, "The women who say they have had affairs with ghosts: They're not mad, but respectable twenty somethings who say spooks are better lovers than men". As promised, the article was as positive and upbeat in tone as possible, recounting the confessions of one 25-year-old woman, Sian Jameson, who said she was left 'breathless' after several nights' sex with a ghost called Robert, "an amorous apparition of an artist who had died more than 100 years ago". However, ghostly Robert abandoned her fairly quickly, much to her regret.

KEVIN WINTER / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Ke$ha is one of a number of celebrities who claim to have had supernatural sex (see **FT311:47**).

Another opening up to the *Mail* was Amethyst Realm, a 27-year-old 'spiritual guidance consultant' from Bristol, telling of an 'out of this world' spectral relationship which not only ended her engagement to her childhood sweetheart, but put her off living men for good. "My first time with a ghost was around 10 years ago," she said, claiming she had sex with a ghost two or three times a day.

A third 'spectrophile' was Ann Elizabeth, a 52-year-old charity worker from Lancashire, who claimed to have had sexual encounters with nine different ghosts, which "provided comfort in times of heartbreak". She stated: "At points of sadness in my life I've felt a strong presence," and that "Kitchen utensils would go missing and appear in the living room. The ghosts were playing with me and assuring me I wasn't alone." At best, this sounds like a possibly genuine case of poltergeist activity with a dose of imagination.

The *Mail* perfunctorily included some sceptical views from psychologist Dr Chris French and ghost hunter Steve Parsons, both expressing doubts over the claims being anything more than entirely subjective experiences generated by the imaginations of the women concerned. That these stories echo long-standing traditions and beliefs about revenant lovers, in mythology, literature and poetry – and more lately, the cinema – is obvious. From mediæval works there are accounts of malevolent entities such as succubi and incubi with sexual motives, to which King James I devoted a section in his *Dæmonolgie* (1597). There are also the infamous 'old hag attacks' linked with sleep paralysis, but for which there is still no complete and comprehensive explanation (see *The Terror That Comes in the Night: Supernatural Assault Traditions*, 1982, by David Hufford). Instances have not died out (see *Contagion*, 2014, by Mike Hallowell and Darren Ritson). The state between sleeping and waking is a fruitful one for illusions of all kinds. Hypnagogic and hypnopompic hallucinations (half-asleep and half-awake) sometimes occur at this time; what a mainstream psychologist would probably not accept is that these hallucinations sometimes give evidence of having a paranormal origin. However, their frequency doesn't automatically prove them all to be true, at least in any objective sense, and human sexual behaviour is one of the most notoriously difficult areas of human experience to study.

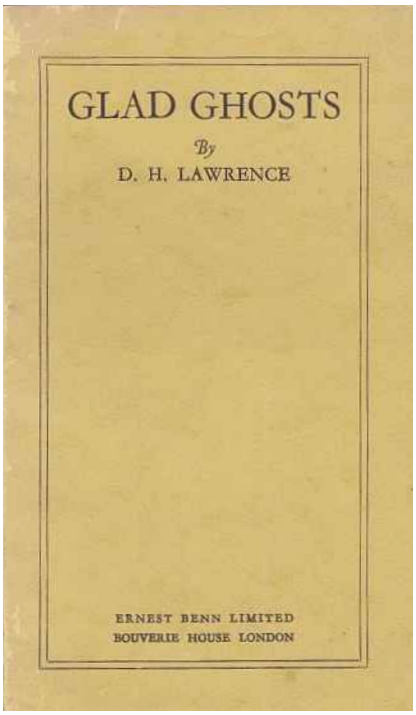
Corroboration is often difficult enough in sexual offences involving the living, let alone claimed encounters with the dead. As DH Lawrence, who explored the theme of ghostly love in *Glad Ghosts* (1916), stated: "I shall never know if it was a ghost, some sweet spirit from the innermost of the ever-deepening cosmos; or a woman, a very

ABOVE: Fictional treatments of spectral love include the popular 1990 film *Ghost*, starring Patrick Swayze and Demi Moore. **ABOVE**: An earlier exploration of the theme was DH Lawrence's 1916 short story *Glad Ghosts*, published in book form in 1926 collection of the same name.

woman as the silkiness of my limbs seems to attest; or a dream, a hallucination!"

Doubtless most sincere spiritualists today would also express dismay at claims of "spectrophilia". Sexual relations are usually far from their minds of most people sitting with mediums or attending services at spiritualist churches. It is the loneliness and separation caused by death, not a search for sexual substitutes, that draws people to seances. The urge of husbands and wives to be re-united with deceased loved partners is not driven by unrequited physical yearnings, but primarily by a wish for emotional communication and the shared feelings of love, affection and companionship that existed in life.

Nonetheless, in certain historic cases intimate contact between sitters and the presumed materialised spirit was claimed. Veteran researcher Hereward Carrington (1880-1958), who was present at a number of such séances, took the view that what transpired either involved women mediums suffering abnormal mental conditions (usually given the blanket diagnosis of 'hysteria') or were attempts to defraud



sitters. This is a vexed area with certain devout spiritualists insisting nothing untoward was taking place at all in certain famous cases, sexual or otherwise (e.g. the famous 'Katie King' séances involving Sir William Crookes in the 1870s). As HJ Hyslop observed: "The history of 'spiritualism' is undoubtedly a heavy incubus for the scientific man to bear." ('Observations of Certain Trance Phenomena', Proceedings of the SPR vol.16, 1901). That fraud remains a danger is illustrated by other recent stories in the *Daily Mail* such as 'Man paid psychics $718,000 after they promised they could re-incarnate his dead ex-girlfriend and send him back in time' and 'The Supernatural Swindlers' (17 Nov 2015; 14 May 2014). In contrast, what is claimed as 'spectrophilia' in the *Mail* is a very different social phenomenon in that all the women interviewed claimed that theirs are consensual couplings involving no mediums or intermediaries.

As Charles Fort would have pointed out, it is really a matter of fashion as to whether controversial claims are believed or tolerated. In Renaissance Europe such stories as these would have received attention from earnest theologians debating not simply the moral aspects, but what might be deduced about the corporality of spirit bodies. Less scholarly reactions would have demanded severe punishment for them as traffickers with demons or subjected them to exorcism.

Clearly, there's no risk of that reaction in the UK now. A generation ago, a minister from the Church of England might have been quoted condemning such practices, but such has been the liberalisation of sexual attitudes that the story in the *Mail* scarcely attracted any wider attention at all. However, in our secularist times, one wonders to what extent women making these claims actually give formal recognition to their ghostly partners, beyond the gushing stories given to journalists?

For instance, are they recording the existence of their ghostly partners on official documents? Are they prepared to enter their presence for council tax, insurance purposes or health claims? Will they be prepared to seek marriage or civil partnerships? And what would be the response of officialdom be if they did?

If by any chance spectrophilia is a new fashion, will we see committed 'spectrophiles' forming political lobbies and pressure groups demanding formal recognition for their phantom lovers? Will people be accused of being 'spectrophobic' if they disagree or disapprove – or even for just saying they're afraid of ghosts? Could claims be brought under discrimination legislation concerning phantom paramours? It has long been said there is equality in death, after all.

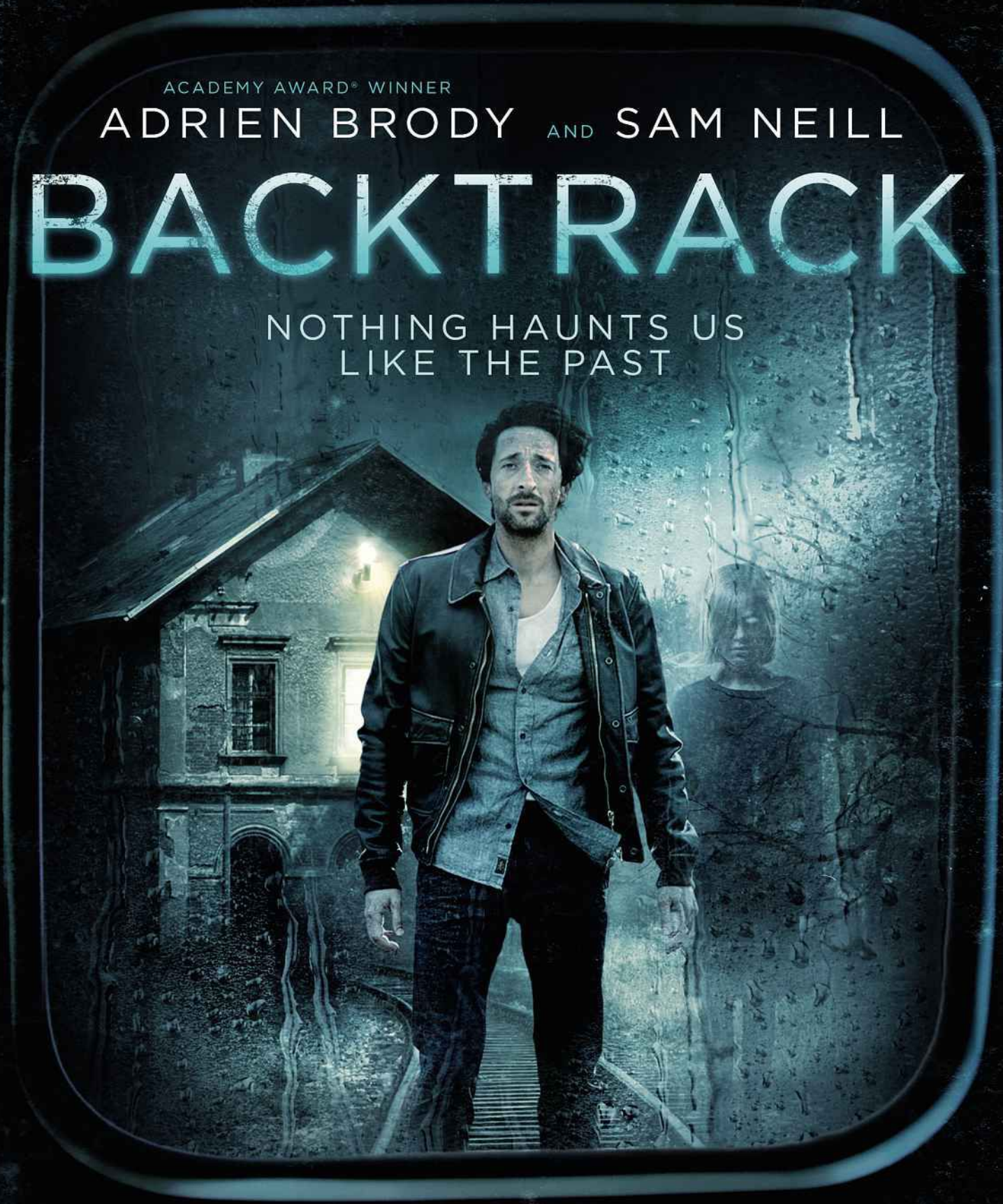
But in the meantime, I would certainly caution these ladies against repeating their novel accounts of spectral lovers in many parts of the Middle East today, and indeed anywhere applying Islamic sharia law codes. Their stories just might be taken seriously...

ACADEMY AWARD® WINNER

ADRIEN BRODY AND SAM NEILL

BACKTRACK

NOTHING HAUNTS US
LIKE THE PAST



IN SELECT CINEMAS, DIGITAL & ON DEMAND – JAN 29TH

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MATT PATTINSON

ARCHÆOLOGY

Our archæological round-up is brought to you by **PAUL DEVEREUX**, Managing Editor of *Time & Mind – The Journal of Archæology, Consciousness and Culture* (www.tandfonline.com/rtam)

THE LOST MONUMENT

There has been much, slightly unclear, reporting in the press about ongoing archæological work on the Preseli Hills of South Wales, provenance of the Stonehenge bluestones. Most authorities have long agreed that they came from various igneous rock outcrops on a ridge crowned by the Carn Menyn group of outcrops or on the slopes of the ridge. (Professor Timothy Darvill and colleagues have identified a Neolithic quarry actually at Carn Menyn, with evidence it was also used even earlier, in the Mesolithic era.) According to the current findings of a team of researchers from University College London, the Universities of Manchester, Bournemouth and Southampton, Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales, and the Dyfed Archæological Trust, most (not all) of the dolerite bluestones that made it the 140 miles (225km) to Stonehenge came from the Carn Goedog outcrop on the north-eastern flank of the ridge – project director Professor Mike Parker Pearson has argued for this site for some time now. The team has now also found and excavated a Neolithic quarry site at a strikingly white rhyolite outcrop a mile or so (2km) north, at Craig Rhos-y-felin. (Although only five rhyolite stones at Stonehenge are now extant, only the fragment – called 'debitage' – of one has so far been geologically 'fingerprinted' as coming from Craig Rhos-y-felin.) The columnar formation of all these Preseli rocks allows thin blocks to be relatively easily prised loose using wooden wedges soaked with water, providing almost ready-made standing stones.

This research has resulted in two noteworthy new possibilities. One is that the fact that because Geodog and Craig Rhos-y-felin are located north of the bulk of the Carn Menyn ridge, they could not readily have been transported southwards from the ridge to Milford Haven as has always been maintained, but more likely were taken along a route to the north, then either by sea around St David's Head, or eastwards overland through the valleys along the route that is now the A40 trunk road. The bluestones are the shortest standing stones at Stonehenge, averaging two tons apiece, and could certainly have been transported overland. Parker Pearson states that teams of people or oxen could have managed this. "We know from examples in India and elsewhere in Asia that single stones this size can even be carried on wooden lattices by groups of sixty – they didn't even have to drag them if they didn't want to," he says. (Of course, it needs pointing out that bluestones sourced from outcrops on top of the Carn Menyn ridge could have taken the southern route.)

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON

The second possibility the research raises is more remarkable. Radiocarbon dating of burnt hazelnuts and charcoal the team recovered from the quarry-workers' campfires reveals unexpectedly early dates for the exploitation of the quarries. "We have dates of around 3,400 BC for Craig Rhos-y-felin and 3,200 BC for Carn Goedog," says Parker Pearson, "which is intriguing because the bluestones didn't get put up at Stonehenge until around 2,900 BC." This means that either the dating of the erection of stones at Stonehenge has to be revised backwards in time, or, far more likely in the team's

PAUL DEVEREUX

TOP: The archaeological team excavating the quarry at Craig Rhos-y-felin. **ABOVE LEFT**: Professor Timothy Darvill alongside a standing stone he and Geoffrey Wainwright discovered on the Carn Menyn ridge. He suspects this could have been a waymarker for transporting bluestones down off the ridge on the southern route to Wiltshire and Stonehenge. **ABOVE**: Part of the Carn Goedog outcrop, apparently the major source of Stonehenge's spotted dolerite bluestones. Paul Devereux and Jon Wozencroft recorded ringing ('musical') rocks here during a 2014 study of the Carn Menyn area for the Royal College of Art, but they found none at Craig Rhos-y-felin.

consideration, the first stones from the quarries were used to erect a monument somewhere between Goedog and Craig Rhos-y-felin: the hypothesis is that this Preseli bluestone monument was disassembled after a few centuries and the stones transported to the new site of Stonehenge. Using geophysical surveys, trial excavations and aerial photographic analysis throughout the area, the team suspects it may have identified the spot. "We may find something big in 2016," says Professor Kate Welham of Bournemouth University, somewhat tantalisingly. *Mail Online, Guardian, 7 Dec 2015. (Original paper in Antiquity)*

UNSEEN IN PLAIN VIEW

ITAMAR GRINBERG / ISRAELTOURISM

As regular readers of this column will have noted, previously unknown ancient stone or earthen configurations in remote deserts and wastes are periodically discovered, or rediscovered, and usually from the air. Often, their purposes are difficult to decipher and they remain mysterious. This is the case with an enigmatic feature on the Golan Heights, the contested land between Israel and Syria. After Israel captured the territory from Syria in the 1967 war, an aerial survey revealed a group of five concentric stone circles over 500ft (150m) wide. Each circle comprises thousands of small basalt rocks. From ground level the complex just looks like the tumbled remains of walling, and was simply known in Arabic as *Rujm el-Hiri* ('stone heap of the wild cat'). It took the airview to reveal its proper, geometric form. Moreover, in the centre of the circles is a feature archæological excavation has shown to be a prehistoric burial chamber, 20ft (6m) long and over 16ft (5m) high.

No one knows who built the complex. From pottery fragments and flint tools found at the site it is estimated that construction started around 3,500 BC and continued in phases for centuries thereafter. There is a tenuous possibility of the site having archæoastronomical significance because it has been noticed that gaps in the rocks align to sunrise at the two solstices in the year. Although the site is within an area used for training by the Israeli army, it is apparently open to visitors at weekends. *[R] 11 Nov 2015.*

CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

195: HOW MANY MILES TO BABYLON?

Instead of adopting Sharia Law, as many Islamists wish, why not consider Hammurabi's Law Code, promulgated c. 1770 BC? So, let us babble on about Babylon, courtesy of LW King's online translation – a conversation in cuneiform might not get us very far.

Apart from vainglorious preface and epilogue, the Code has 282 separate provisions, thematically grouped, covering various aspects of civic, military, and private behaviour. Religious offences are notably absent. The basic principle is – with various permutations of detail – An Eye for an Eye.... Some choice examples (numbered as in text and translation) follow; cf. **FT245:19** for comparative ancient law and lawyers.

Good to know that punitive judges themselves are not exempt from retribution. If (5) convicted of any flawed legal opinion or verdict, he is fined and permanently debarred – Rumpole would have approved.

Seems to have been a lot of housebreaking. What was the Babylonian bobbies' clean-up rate of cases? Burglars (21) smashing their way into premises (early ram-raiding?) were immured alive in the damaged area.

No mercy for looters (25), sentenced to be burned alive within the blaze – would this have been a deterrent in Tottenham?

The authorities kept a sharp eye on taverns, both dodgy staff and drinkers (108-110). A barmaid found guilty of over-charging would be "thrown into the water". Women of ill repute who either ran or drank in a Babylonian boozer were burned alive – Step Backwards, Bet Lynch and Tracey. Tavern keepers who allowed conspirators to meet and plot without reporting them were liable to execution – might have stopped Adolf in his Munich beer-hall tracks.

Numerous laws (129-57) deal with marital and sexual issues. An adulterous couple caught in the act "shall be tied together and thrown into the water". So will women who desert husbands on military service overseas – might give comfort to squaddies in Afghanistan and Iraq. Same thing, in fact, for all errant wives – can imagine Arthur Daley pointing this out to 'Er Indoors. Throughout the Code, there is alternation between burning and drowning – in this section, the flames await couples convicted of incest.

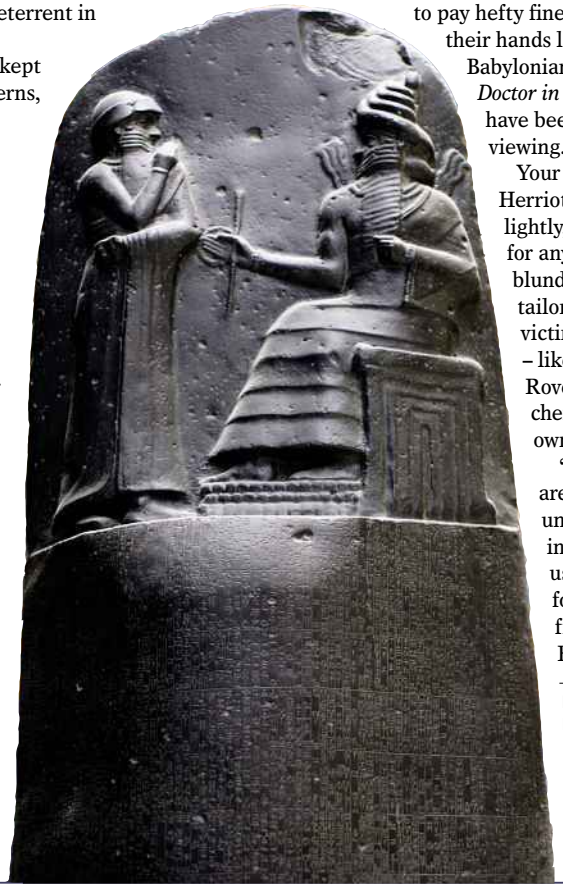
One law's (132) wording shows that Babylonian legalese could be as opaque as ours: "If 'the finger is pointed' (King's quotation marks) at a man's wife about another man, but she is not caught sleeping with the other man, she shall jump into the water for her husband" – Answers on a post-card, Please.

Modern social workers would be aghast at the exoculations and glottotomies prescribed (192-3) for sons who announce to adoptive parents that they wish to find their 'biological parents'.

Those dissatisified with the NHS will approve the laws which ordered, in proportion to the offence, bungling surgeons to pay hefty fines or have their hands lopped off – a Babylonian *Casualty* or *Doctor in the House* would have been prime-time viewing.

Your local James Herriots got off more lightly, being punished for any operating blunders by fines tailored to the animal victim's market value – like the British, Rover was more cherished than his owner.

"The prisons are filled with unconventional interpreters of uses. If it were not for uses, we'd be free of lawyers" – Fort, *Books*, p981



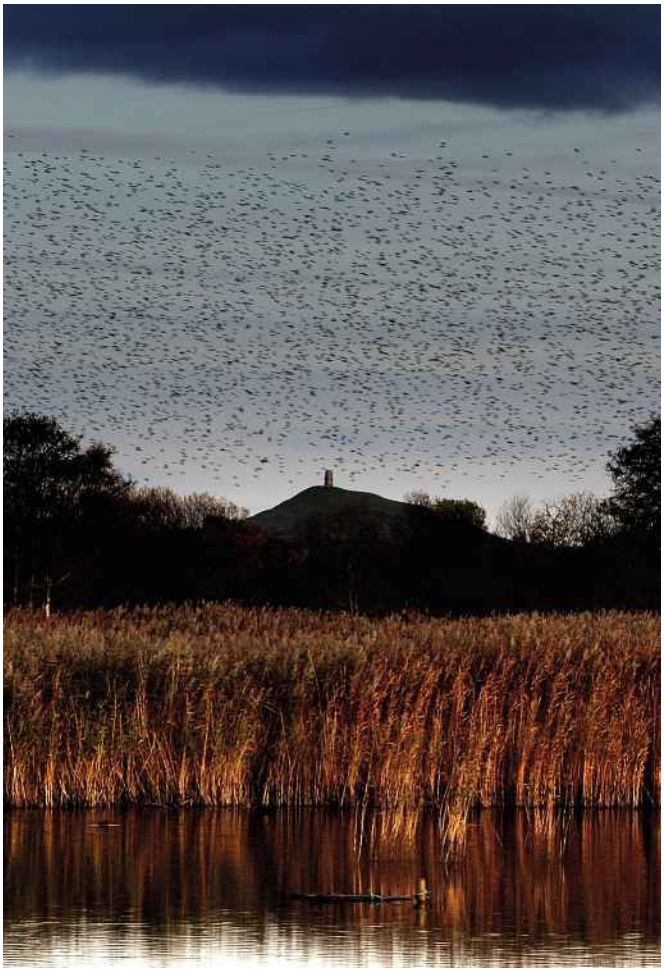
LEFT: The Code of Hammurabi, the longest surviving text of the Old Babylonian Period, on a basalt stele found in 1901.

ANIMAL DIE-OFFS

The past year has seen a number of cases of mysterious mass deaths of animals, birds and fish around the world

• Renowned for flying in enormous flocks – sometimes more than a million strong – starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*) are mysteriously drowning en masse in garden ponds across Britain. Researchers studied 12 incidents between 1993 and 2013 of starling drownings in groups of two to 80. In 10 of these incidents more than 10 birds died. From wells to water butts, there seems to be no body of water so small that young starlings cannot find a way to die in it. In 2008, for instance, 12 were found in a plastic bucket holding no more than 4in (10cm) of water. A few have even turned up in watering cans and birdbaths. One expert said that the mass mortalities were "really unusual", with drowning considered a rare cause of death among wild bird populations and normally only recorded as affecting individual birds. Records since 1909 of 800,000 ringed birds from 79 species reveal that drowning was more commonly recorded as a probable cause of death in starlings than in any other species. Post mortems revealed no evidence that underlying disease had been a factor; nor was there any link with heatwaves. Most incidents involved juveniles of only a few months old and all occurred during the spring and early summer months. "Drowning appears to be a more common cause of death amongst younger birds as they may be inexperienced in identifying water hazards," said Dr Becki Lawson of the Zoological Society of London. "This combined with the fact that starlings are a highly social species could potentially explain why multiple birds drown together." The starling population in the UK has dropped from 45 million in 1980s to 3.4 million, making them a red-listed or threatened species – mainly due to loss of nesting sites and a lack of insect food sources. *D.Telegraph & Times online, 25 Nov 2015.*

• More than 100,000 small seabirds called Cassin's auklets washed up dead on the west coast of North America between October 2014 and January 2015. They had come from Haida Gwai in British Columbia as far as San Francisco. Young auklets often die during winter storms, but the number of dead was between 10 and 100 times the normal. There was no evidence of disease or poison; the birds were actually starving to death, which was puzzling, because other birds that feed on the same types of shrimp and plankton were not affected. Speculation was that several factors were at play, including a spike in births, conditions at sea pushing them closer to shore than normal and perhaps something involving their prey. Or maybe the whole population of these birds, which normally spend the winter far out over the North Pacific, was for some reason much closer to the shore. The geographical spread of the dead auklets was thought to be unprecedented. *(COASST) via thewatchers.adorraeli.com, 9 Jan 2015.*



MATT CARDY / GETTY IMAGES

KAZAKHSTAN MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE

LEFT: Starlings are perishing in mass drownings in the UK. **BELOW:** Half the world's population of Saiga antelope died suddenly in May 2015.

• Around half of the world's critically endangered Saiga antelope died suddenly in Kazakhstan in the fortnight following 10 May: about 120,000 animals from a global population of about 250,000. An unknown environmental trigger is thought to have caused pasteurelosis and clostridia, two types of normally benign bacteria found in the antelopes' gut, to turn deadly. The animals died within hours of showing symptoms, which included diarrhoea and frothing at the mouth. Because it was calving season, entire herds of female antelope and their newborn calves were wiped out. "They get into respiratory problems. They stop eating and are extremely depressed; the mothers die and then the calves are very distressed and then they die maybe one or two days later," said Richard Kock from

the Royal Veterinary College in London. One possible trigger is climatic. A very cold winter was followed by a wet spring, which may have affected the immune competence of the animals, making them more vulnerable to the bacteria – though it is thought the deaths occurred too quickly to be attributed to a transmissible disease.The Saiga antelope is a species adapted to cope with the extremes of temperature found on the central Asian steppes of Kazakhstan. About the size of a large sheep, they once roamed in their millions from Great Britain to northern China. In 1984, 2010 and 2012 there were also massive die-offs, but none claimed such a high proportion of the population as this latest one, which has wiped out four of the six calving herds in the largest remaining – and best protected – "Betpak-dala" population, in central Kazakhstan. Despite these huge losses, Saiga antelope are surprisingly well adapted to recover quickly from population crashes. "Its strategy for survival is based on a high reproductive rate, so [the Saiga] produce triplets and have the highest fœtal biomass of any mammal," said Prof Kock. "It's built, in a sense, to recover from collapse." *BBC News, 1 June; Guardian, 4 Nov 2015.*

• Early last September, hundreds of dead eels from Southeast Asia mysteriously washed ashore near the mouth of the Nottawasaga River on the Georgian Bay of Lake Huron in Ontario, Canada. They were identified as peacock eels (*Macrognathus siamensis*), also known as the Siamese Spiny Eel or Peacock Spiny Eel. Peacock eels have never been reported before in any of the Great Lakes. Native to Thailand, they are also found in rivers and streams in India, Sri Lanka, Sumatra and Malaysia. How on earth did they get to Lake Huron? Teleportation? A few might have been dumped by a fish tank owner – but hundreds? And what had killed them? Being a tropical species, they probably couldn't survive a winter in Lake Huron, but in September the waters were still warm... *mysteriousuniverse.org, 15 Sept 2015.*

A–Z ALIEN ZOO

KARL SHUKER presents his regular round-up from the crypto-zoological garden

MONKEY BUSINESS IN JAVA

During summer 2009, some colour photographs were snapped of a very distinctive-looking form of monkey on sale in Ratu Soerja market, Matingan, in eastern Java, one of Indonesia's Greater Sunda islands. In 2010, primatological researcher Francesco Nardelli observed two of these photos online, each depicting a langur specimen characterised in particular by a black face surrounded by bright golden fur (and also, in subsequently-viewed photos of additional specimens, by a grey v-shaped dorsal mantle). He spent the subsequent five years surveying captive langurs in British, American, and Indonesian zoos, langur skins and skulls in museums, and online photographic resources in a bid to determine whether this visually memorable langur form represented a species new to science. His investigations eventually convinced him that it did, and in 2015 he formally dubbed it the golden-crowned langur *Presbytis johnaspinalli*, honouring the late British zoo founder/conservationist John Aspinall.

However, not everyone is convinced by this diagnosis. Following the publication by the *International Zoo News* journal of Nardelli's paper describing and naming this new species (which has never been recorded in the wild), a prominent British primatologist suggested that the specimens in the photos upon which the species is based may have been of an already known species, but whose appearance had been modified by the Javanese market trader(s) selling them. When recently interviewed by the nature news website Mongabay concerning this particular case, Oxford Brookes University primatologist Dr Vincent Nijman reportedly opined that the langur specimens were most likely modified ebony langurs *Trachypithecus auratus*, adding:

"I have seen these dyed (or bleached, I am not sure) langurs before, both in the markets in east Java and in rescue centres in east Java in the early 2000s. This dyeing I have seen in *Trachypithecus* langurs, some *Presbytis* langurs and slow lorises (making it difficult to identify what species we are actually dealing with) as well as other wild-caught mammals (e.g. civets). Birds and domesticated animals can also be dyed but here it is often the whole animal that changes colour. It is done to increase the 'novelty factor' and, ultimately, the price."

However, Nardelli has discounted this view, reaffirming to Mongabay that in his opinion the langurs' appearance was genuine, and stating that in over 10 years of working in Indonesia, he had never encountered any artificially coloured mammals. Until a specimen is formally examined, however, this controversy is likely to remain unresolved.

http://news.mongabay.com/2015/10/bird-market-photo-yields-an-unknown-monkey-species-in-indonesia/ 23 Oct 2015; International Zoo News, vol.62, no.5 (2015), pp.323-336; http://www.researchgate.net/publication/283539651_A_new_Colobinae_from_the_Sundiac_region_The_Golden-crowned_Langur_Presbytis_johnaspinalli_sp._nov.

STILL BEAVERING AWAY IN DEVON

Last summer, I wrote about the unexpected presence of European beavers *Castor fiber* in Devon's River Otter, first reported there in 2013 but still unexplained, which has attracted considerable scientific, media, and public interest, as well as speculation as to their origin [**FT331:19**]. In early November, however, the British media contained various reports claiming that Devon's most surprising mammals had seemingly vanished, none apparently having been sighted for the past six weeks. When I consulted the Devon Wildlife Trust's official website in search of clarification and further news, however, I was happy and relieved to read in a special update of 2 November that this is not the case. Quoting from their update:

"These [claims] seem to have stemmed from advance publicity for a BBC *Inside Out* broadcast on the beavers scheduled for broadcast on Monday 2 November. This publicity spoke of the animals' disappearance from one stretch of the river. [However:] Our regular monitoring proves that the beavers have not 'disappeared' from the river Otter, although they may have moved their location on the river. Our evidence shows: beavers are still active on four areas of the river; a beaver was seen on the river over the weekend of 31 October-1 November; within the last two weeks an adult beaver was seen on the river in the same area that the BBC film talks of beavers having 'disappeared' from; we have found two other areas of the river in which there are very recent signs of beaver activity in the form of gnawed trees. Beavers are mobile animals and very capable of exploring large areas of a river. The river Otter is 30 miles in length, contains lots of suitable beaver habitat and the density of the beaver population is low. This provides great potential for the animals to move location."

Clearly, therefore, these elusive mega-rodents are merely beavering away elsewhere along their riverine home, having not 'Otterly' vanished after all (sorry!).

D. Mail + http://www.devonwildlifetrust.org/devons-wild-beavers/ 2 Nov 2015.

KARL PORTMAN

BLOODY MIRACLES

Bleeding communion wafers, weeping statues of the Blessed Virgin Mary and California's dining table Jesus

JOHN LUKE / AP / PRESS ASSOCIATION IMAGES

ABOVE: The weeping BVM of St Mary Catholic Church in Griffith, Indiana. **BELOW:** The bleeding Salt Lake City wafer. **OPPOSITE:** The face of Jesus on Jaime Beebe's dining table.

• A 'bleeding' piece of communion wafer has been hailed as a miracle at a church in Utah. Faithful followers claim the sacramental bread 'bled' for several days following Mass at St Francis Xavier Church in Kearns, Salt Lake City, after it was placed in a glass of water on 8 November 2015. A leftover or unwanted consecrated Host must not be thrown away but should be dissolved in water until it no longer has the appearance of bread. It can then be poured down a special sink that drains onto the ground rather than into a sewer. However, on this occasion, the priest claims that not only did the thin wafer stay intact, but also began to turn blood red. News quickly spread and believers began flocking to the church, though there were no immediate plans to return the wafer to public display. The Catholic Diocese of Salt Lake City is investigating, and might conclude it was merely mould.

• Eucharist miracles have surrounded the communion ceremony for over 1,000 years. The bleeding Host is the most common while others have reported miracles of sacramental bread passing through a fire unharmed, being preserved for centuries, vanishing before turning up in churches, and levitating. The most celebrated 'miracle' of the bleeding Host was the Mass at Bolsena in 1263, depicted by a famous fresco in the Raphael rooms of the Vatican Palace. A Bohemian priest who doubted the doctrine of transubstantiation – the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist – celebrated Mass at Bolsena, a town just north of Rome. During the Mass the Host began to bleed, with the blood falling onto the tablecloth in the shape of a cross (or the face of Jesus), reinforcing the cleric's faith. The following year, Pope Urban IV instituted the Feast of Corpus Christi to celebrate this miraculous event.

• On 13 March 1345, a priest was allegedly called to administer the last rites to a dying man in Amsterdam. He told the family that if the man vomited, they were to take his vomit and throw it in the fire. The man threw up, and the family duly followed the priest's advice. The next morning, one of the women went to rake the fire and noticed the Host sitting on the grate, unscathed and surrounded by light. It has apparently passed through both the man's digestive system and the fire unscathed. That's one version of the story, anyway. It is commemorated with an annual silent procession through central Amsterdam.

• Caesarius of Heisterbach (c.1180-c.1240) recounts various tales of Eucharistic miracles in his book, *Dialogue on Miracles.*

These include Gotteschalk of Volmarstein who saw an infant in the Eucharist, a priest from Wickindisburg who saw the Host turn into raw flesh, and a man from Hemmenrode who saw an image of a crucified Jesus and blood dripping from the Host. All of these images, however, eventually reverted into the Host. He also recounts even more extraordinary tales, such as bees creating a shrine to Jesus after a piece of the Eucharist was placed in a beehive.

• On 14 March 2015, a Californian couple noticed the appearance of Jesus – just a few days before Easter – on their pine dining table. "We were having dinner with some friends when we noticed it," said Jaimie Beebe, 37, a casting director from Los Angeles. "It just appeared that night, it was like a miracle." Her boyfriend Gary Ousdahl, 37, was also awed by its appearance. "I've sat at this table a million times but never seen Jesus on it before," he said. Its deep spiritual meaning didn't stop them putting the table on eBay with a $5,000 (£3,350) price tag.

• In 2014, a group of schoolchildren noticed what appeared to be a tear-stained cheek on a 4ft (1.2m) statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary in a sunken garden outside St Mary Catholic Church in Griffith, Indiana. Many interpreted the 'weeping' sculpture as a sign from above. Students in the class had left the church after confession, paused at the statue to pray and noticed a droplet of water clinging to the BVM's chin and appearing to originate from her right eye. The church pastor, the Rev Theodore Mens, was sceptical. "There must be a natural explanation – the cold, the melting of the snow," he said. "Whenever we see something, we always look for a natural reason first."

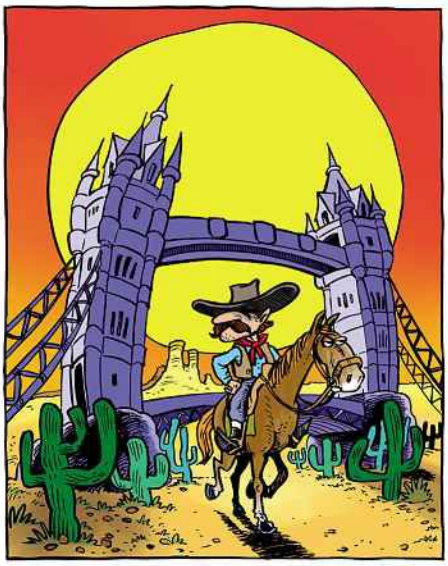
• In 2012, the faithful flocked to the front garden of a house in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, to witness a statue of the Madonna and Child that they believed was bleeding. The householder, Hai Nguyen, was cutting his lawn when he looked up and saw blood on the statue, which seemed to be coming out of Mary's temple. As news spread and more believers arrived, the family erected a gazebo to shelter the statue and its faithful visitors. In 2011, visitors to a religious lending library in Reading, Ohio, claimed they saw a teardrop on the cheek of a BVM statue and another on the chin.

D.Mail online, 10 April 2014; 30 Nov 2015; Salt Lake (UT) Tribune, 26 Nov 2015.

Mythconceptions

by Mat Coward

96: LONDON BRIDGE



The myth

A gullible Yank bought London Bridge, carefully dismantled it and took it home with him to Texas, proudly believing all the while that what he'd now got in his back garden was the much more famous Tower Bridge. This proves that people from the USA are gullible; that rich people are gullible; and that Londoners are sharp.

The "truth"

Missourian entrepreneur Robert P McCulloch bought London Bridge because he wanted London Bridge. One of a number of bridges that have been known, over the centuries, as "London Bridge," this particular one was built in 1831. By the 1960s, it was no longer able to cope with modern traffic levels. The decision was taken to replace it, and the City of London committee responsible for bridges came up with the idea of flogging it off instead of just demolishing it. McCulloch was in the process of building a new city in Arizona, and was on the look-out for a nice bridge to go across the Colorado River. He rightly figured that erecting a London landmark would capture the imagination of the news media, and happily paid £1,029,000 for his 30,000-ton jigsaw. Reassembled, it began its new life in the New World in October 1971. The legend that McCulloch got the wrong structure falls down upon even cursory examination; he was photographed personally examining London Bridge during the negotiations. In any case, it's plainly unimaginable that the complex measuring and plotting and planning necessary for such an extraordinary undertaking could have succeeded if the two sides to the bargain were talking about two different bridges.

Sources

www.dailymail.co.uk/home/books/article-2275097/The-batty-American-bought-London-Bridge-LONDON-BRIDGE-IN-AMERICA-BY-TRAVIS-ELBOROUGH.html; www.thisislocallondon.co.uk/news/169982.how_london_bridge_was_sold_to_the_states

Disclaimer

Of course, if you can blow this story out of the water, please let us know via the letters page.

Mythchaser

A reader wants to know if her goat is unusual in being a fussy eater – or is it just a myth that goats will eat literally anything, from tin cans to kebabs?

DON'T MISS MYTHCONCEPTIONS: TH...
OUT NOW ONLINE AND IN ALL GOOD BOOK...

FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

Flash-frozen fish and foxes, a sex-changing yew, more cattle mutilations and a new case of SHC

INGOLF KRISTIANSEN / FACEBOOK

ABOVE: Frozen fish at Vorlund, 2014. **OPPOSITE:** The Fortingall yew.

A CUT ABOVE THE REST? [FT163:24, 295:28]

Mysterious cattle mutilations were a major feature of ufology in the 1970s and 1980s (see "Poor Cow", **FT68:23-29**), but have become far less frequent in subsequent decades – or, at least, far less frequently reported. The 'classic' cattle mutilation included several of the following features: the removal of sexual organs, one or both eyes or ears, the tongue or flesh of the lower jaw. The bodies appeared to have been drained of blood and the incisions described as 'surgically precise'. Some cuts suggested a scalpel while others showed an odd 'pinking shears' effect. In the more elaborate cases, the head might be stripped of flesh, the anus 'cored out' and major organs such as the heart removed. There would be no tracks or footprints visible around the carcases, even on muddy or snow-covered ground, and predators gave them a wide berth. Targets for blame included satanic cults, extraterrestrials or covert government agents.

One such cattle mutilation occurred last summer in Madden, some 28 miles (45km) northwest of Calgary in Alberta, Canada. On 6 June, neighbours called to tell Keren Farquharson that a cow on her farm was not moving. When she approached it, she saw the udder, vagina and uterus were missing, along with a single eye. It was a hot day and the cow hadn't bloated by midday, suggesting whatever happened took place that morning, not the night before. Farquharson's husband Louis Delgado, who used to work at a farm-animal surgery, found no blood, while the basketball-sized hole showed no jagged edges. "I've seen hundreds of surgeries, and this was surgery," he said. "It doesn't add up."

However, the RCMP (Mounties) announced their investigation was closed; it was an animal incident with nothing suspicious. They advised the family not go public with the story, for fear of encouraging copycats, but Farquharson refused. "No, it's a crime and it's an unsolved crime," she said, fearing she'll never see justice or compensation. Her brother Don Farquharson, who owned the mutilated cow, noted that two weeks later it was decomposing and no coyotes or birds had come to eat the normally sought-after intestines. He claimed that only happened when an animal had been given drugs. "It makes me think she's had something to be sedated," he said, but he was not willing to spend upwards of $500 on an autopsy to find out. *Calgary Herald, 20 June 2015.*

DEEP FREEZE MYSTERY [FT331:73, 333:67]

In 1941, "hundreds" of horses were reportedly found frozen into a lake in Finland; and in the 1950s, dozens of coots and moorhens were observed frozen into an ice sheet on a Cornish pond. In mid-January 2014 thousands of herring were flash-frozen in a Norwegian bay near the island of Lovund after a harsh wind caused temperatures to suddenly dip to minus 7.8°C. The huge shoal was swimming too close to the surface, maybe fleeing predators such as whales, when the water suddenly froze around them. Normally, fish would be able to swim underneath the ice.

A week later, a skater on Lake Bunn, near Jönköping in southern Sweden, came upon a fox frozen into the ice. He initially thought it was a piece of foam rubber, but found the poor creature dead in the ice with its head just above the surface. "The ice had obviously cracked and the fox had fallen through the hole," said Jeffer Sandström, 26. "Unable to get out after scrabbling around, it must have tried to swim under the ice in a last-ditch effort to save itself and then probably suffocated. I guessed the ice was between three and five centimetres [1–2in] thick." Earlier that winter, a moose was found frozen solid, half visible above the ice, after falling through the frozen surface of a Norwegian lake. *Independent, 17 Jan; dailymail.co.uk, 24 Jan 2014.*

SPONTANEUS HUMAN COMBUSTION? [FT300:5]

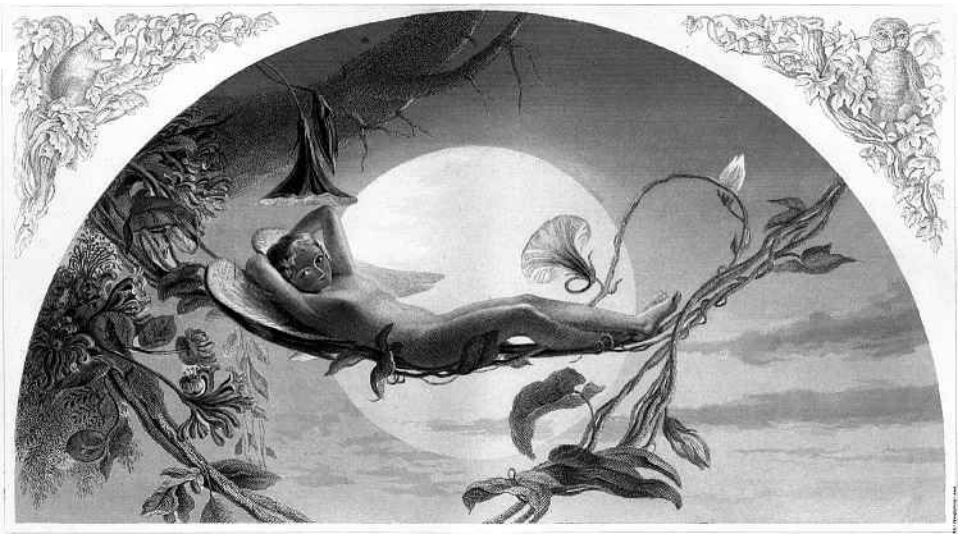
A woman was left fighting for her life after witnesses saw her suddenly bursting into flames on a park bench shortly before seven o'clock on 2 November. According to the *Flensburger Tagesblatt* and *The Local*, fire and smoke emerged from the woman, who was in her mid-40s and originally from Mauritius, as she sat on a bench beside a playground in Flensburg, northern Germany. She was left severely burned, despite the best efforts of a passer-by who tried beating out the blaze with his jacket. Witnesses said the woman didn't make a sound as the flames engulfed her. She was taken to a specialist burns unit in Lübeck, where she was said to be in a critical condition. Some reports claimed that she had died, but this could not be confirmed. Prosecutors were said to be keeping an open mind as to the cause of the incident. Prosecutor Ulrike Stahlmann-Liebelt said they had not ruled out suicide. One witness claimed she saw two men in the vicinity shortly before the incident. However, according to the *IB Times*, Flensburg public prosecutor Otto Gosch said: "We have no evidence that points to a third party fault." The *Daily Mail* suggested it was a case of SHC (Spontaneous Human Combustion). In September 2011, a coroner in West Galway, Ireland, declared that the death of Michael Faherty, 76, was a case of SHC, supposedly the first time a coroner had admitted to such a possibility [**FT281:14-15**]. Readers unfamiliar with the arguments pro and con SHC should refer back to our report. *The Local (Germany), 3 Nov; Independent.co.uk, 5 Nov 2015.*

THE IMMORTAL YEW [FT330:36-43, 332:74-75]

The Fortingall Yew in Perthshire, believed to be one of the oldest living organisms in Europe (5,000 years), has started changing sex. According to legend, Pontius Pilate was born in its shade and played there as a child. In the 1990s, the tree's great age was doubted, along with that of other prominent British yews (like the Defynnog

Yew in Wales), but the majority of contributors to *The Tree Register Handbook* now accept the earlier estimates. The Fortingall Yew has started sprouting berries on one of its upper branches – something only female trees do. The berries have been collected for protection and their seeds will be included in a project to conserve the genetic diversity of yew trees around the world. If they germinate, the yew will produce its first identifiable offspring in perhaps thousands of years.

Dr Max Coleman from the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh discovered the berries on the tree. He said: "Yews are normally either male or female and in autumn and winter sexing yews is generally easy. Males have small spherical structures that release clouds of pollen when they mature. Females hold bright red berries from autumn into winter. It was, therefore, quite a surprise to me to find a group of three ripe red berries on the Fortingall Yew when the rest of the tree was clearly male. Odd as it may seem, yews, and many other conifers that have separate sexes, have been observed to switch sex. It's not fully understood – normally the switch occurs on part of the crown rather than the entire tree changing sex. In the Fortingall Yew it seems that one small branch in the outer part of the crown has switched and now behaves as female." *BBC News, 2 Nov; Guardian, 3 Nov 2015.*



Fairies, Folklore and Forteana

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

THE LOST CHILDREN

In June 1684, a 10-month-old baby disappeared from the tiny Cornish village of Treonike. The baby had been left in the porch of the house while his family were having breakfast. When the father, a widower, discovered his son's absence he immediately got up a search party and villagers combed the nearby country. If your breathing has become shallow reading this, then relax – the story ends happily.

At least it did according to the Cornish historian William Hals, writing around 1700. At 6pm on the same day, one of the search party found himself near "Gowhattome Wood", about three miles from the child's house, and saw from horseback the baby sitting by a bush "plucking the blossoms there in the same appearance and condition of health it was in the morning".

The mystery of the child's journey into the countryside remained, though, and as not much happened in Treonike, the locals talked about it for a long time after. In fact, they were still talking about the missing child in the 1830s when an old lady of the village told the folklorist Robert Hunt (then a young man) of how a small boy had, years before, been kidnapped by the fairies: the child had been tempted away by music to the realm of the little people and was, she claimed, discovered only several days later. Hals hints at a supernatural explanation, and the good folk of Treonike may well have decided back in 1684 that the missing baby had been stolen by fairies – though, presumably, they did not have a 10-month-child walking through the countryside towards an elusive fairy fiddle.

THE MYSTERY OF THE CHILD'S JOURNEY INTO THE COUNTRYSIDE REMAINED, AND THE LOCALS TALKED ABOUT IT FOR A LONG TIME AFTER

What really happened? We will never know. But it is striking how many cases there are in which children disappear and are later discovered alive or, all too often, dead at distances that would seem to be, as with the case of Treonike, absolutely beyond their physical resources to have travelled.

Take the heartbreaking case of Stephen McKerron (obit 1988), a five-year-old Scottish boy who was eventually found dead in a ditch, six miles from where his aunt and uncle had lost him at a pleasure park, across some particularly, some would say impossibly, wild terrain. The McKerron cases and others like it do not need, in the end, a supernatural explanation, but it is easy to see why people invoke the paranormal. A recent article on Stephen on the excellent blog *Strange Company* led to readers blaming: aliens, fairies and Bigfoot. The authorities (the sheriff and the policemen involved), meanwhile, believe that Stephen made his last journey alone.

Simon Young writes on folklore and history and runs www.fairyist.com

the UFO files

FORTEAN TIMES presents our monthly section featuring regular sighting reports, reviews of classic cases, entries on major ufological topics and hands-on advice for UFO investigators. **The UFO Files** will benefit from your input, so don't hesitate to submit your suggestions and questions.

To contact **The UFO Files**, email: **nufon@btinternet.com**

UFO CASEBOOK

JENNY RANDLES RE-EXAMINES BRITAIN'S BIGGEST AND MOST CONTROVERSIAL UFO CASE 35 YEARS ON

RENDLESHAM FOREST GENESIS: PART ONE

Most people first heard about Britain's 'biggest' UFO case – the events of which took place 35 years ago – only three years later, in October 1983, when it was given a front page headline in the *News of The World* and became an overnight sensation. Its saga of American airmen and local civilians seeing a UFO inside a pine forest was the stuff of Hollywood and gave Roswell a run for its money.

Nowadays, with witnesses popping out of the woodwork as they reach military retirement age and more books having been written about it than any other British case, it's hard to grasp the broader context. But that adds a depth to a story that has long since been lost amid claim and counterclaim.

By chance, I got involved in the case just days after it happened and before it had even made the local papers around the twin USAF bases of Bentwaters and Woodbridge in Suffolk, both leased from the Ministry of Defence. It's worth remembering that these famous encounters came at the tail end of a wave that saw several big cases during the autumn and early winter of 1980.

On 25 November 1980 at 6.40am, the log of a Chevron Oil Rig off the east coast of Scotland described a sighting of a "glowing orange ball" that floated over one of the drilling platforms. The offshore manager, an ex-Royal Navy commander, discovered it was also visible from another rig 15 miles (24km) away. An RAF Nimrod was put on standby to investigate, but the glow disappeared after hovering for five minutes. The following weekend, police officer Alan Godfrey in Todmorden, West Yorkshire started his shift that ended with a UFO leaving physical traces and alleged 'alien abduction' (see **FT325:27, 326:27, 327:29, 328:28-30**).

Many other sightings occurred across the eastern UK in those weeks, but one of the most pertinent involved military radar. Officer Mal Scurrah based at RAF Neatishead in East Anglia was tracking Phantom jets on exercise. Another radar operator picked up a blip with no identification code hovering off the Anglian coast and thought it might be an unscheduled helicopter from one of the rigs. Checks with 'Eastern Radar' at RAF Watton revealed it was not, and two of the Phantoms were sent to investigate. Scurrah then detected an 'angel' on his scope and relayed ongoing movements as it rocketed in minutes from a standing start at 5,000ft (1,500m), just as one Phantom closed in, and was seen by the pilot as a brilliant glow. The UFO rapidly disappeared southward towards Rendlesham and upwards off screen at over 100,000ft (30,500m), far beyond the capabilities of RAF aircraft or further radar coverage. Other local radar data was quickly accessed by the MoD and Scurrah says that the logs revealed how several military systems tracked other UFOs during this period.

Such events indicate an often overlooked build-up of unusual UFO activity on the eastern side of the UK leading up to the Rendlesham story. Meanwhile, that December, whilst working on the Godfrey case, I was invited to brief about British UFOs for the House of Lords study group – a team created by ministers and Lords to pressure politicians. In the magnificent surroundings of the Houses of Parliament I presented my paper to a gaggle of members from the Lords and Commons, meeting former ministers and other figures involved in the defence of our realm. I tried to give an overview about the benefits to science that I felt could emerge from UFO data and even inspire new technology. This later formed the basis of an article in *New Scientist*. I also asked the MoD to release their documentation, as that was then far away. None of us suspected the storm about to break over East Anglia that would test these comments and plague the Ministry for years to come.

The Rendlesham incidents began on the night of 25/26 December 1980, when USAF airmen John Burroughs, Jim Penniston and Ed Cabansag were allowed to go off base into woodland in the early hours to chase a bright light spotted from the east gate falling into the trees. They closed in and found a glowing object that moved away as they engaged in pursuit.

Further reports followed that weekend, including on Saturday 27 December when Lt Colonel Charles Halt, later base commander, led an investigation team from a Christmas party into the woods to "put the growing furore to bed" but instead had close encounters, themselves captured by Halt on his portable tape recorder as they happened. These included a large 'winking' eye, laser-like beams shining onto the base weapons area (with then secret nuclear material) and damage found in the tree tops, holes in the ground and controversial radiation levels on a Geiger counter.

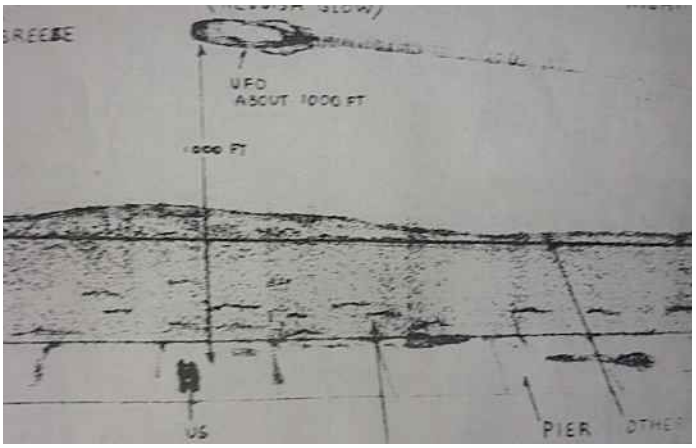
Some local civilians, driving through the forest or living in nearby cottages, saw things too: notably a farmer whose cows were scared by the UFO and later admitted that he received compensation from the USAF and used it to relocate hundreds of miles away. But none of this became public knowledge for years; the large twin bases buzzed with escalating rumours from wannabe UFO watchers while the real eyewitnesses mostly stayed silent. Within days, there were as many tall tales as there were truthful ones and only the witnesses to each event knew which were which.

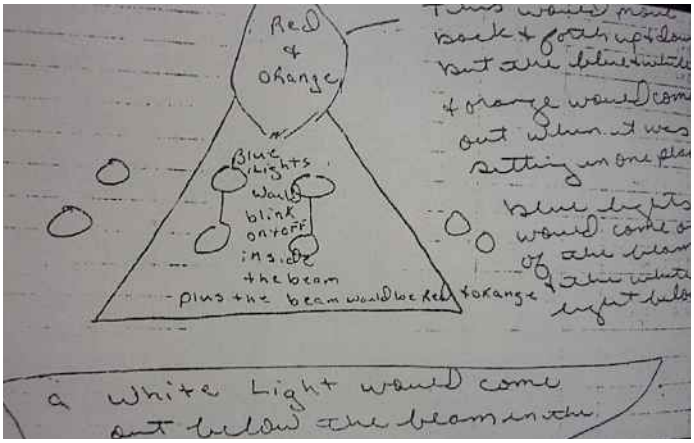
East Anglian paranormal investigator Brenda Butler heard the first of these tales in a pub when befriended by a US military affairs officer on 2 January 1981. She and BUFORA investigator Dot Street began to tour villages during January and February and document a firestorm of rumours.

Meanwhile, I was over 200 miles (320km) away in Cheshire completely oblivious to the above when two events happened in a matter of days that dragged me into the case. The first of these was a letter dated 16 January 1981 from Michael, a Londoner who had been with his friend, Pedro, in that man's Portugese coastal town of Paco de Arcos. Their UFO sighting, around 9 pm on 25 December 1980, was intriguing, but I had as yet no idea that it had happened

S OF THE WORLD
BRITAIN'S BIGGEST SELLING SUNDAY NEWSPAPER
PLUS Sunday
STILL ONLY 25p BEST VALUE FOR MONEY
● Colonel's top secret report tells the facts
● Mystery craft in exploding wall of colour
● Animals flee from strange glowing object
UFO LANDS IN SUFFOLK
A UFO has landed in Britain—and that staggering fact has been officially confirmed.
And that's OFFICIAL
NEWS OF THE WORLD INVESTIGATES
By KEITH BEABEY
EVIDENCE
NO HOAX

LEFT: The 1983 *News of the World* headline that made the Rendlesham case news.




Red & Orange
Blue lights would blink on+off inside the beam
plus the beam would be Red & Orange
a White Light would come out below the beam in the

ABOVE LEFT: A drawing made by the witnesses at Paco de Arcos in Portugal of what they saw late on 25 December 1980. **ABOVE RIGHT:** A sketch made by John Burroughs of what he saw in Rendlesam forest in the early hours of 26 December 1980.

the same night that Burroughs, Penniston and Cabansag entered Rendlesham Forest.

I discovered that these two young men were on a pier on the Paco waterfront facing south and saw a large red "comet with a tail" move slowly to the northwest, heading into the Atlantic. It left a visible reflection in the water and, they claimed, was low enough to churn up the sea. Then the UFO suddenly changed direction and came towards them, now heading northeast. As it passed overhead they felt a tingling on their shoulders and in their hair and a 'prickly heat' on their skin that disappeared as the thing headed away inland over mountains. It was in view for about two and a half minutes.

That night, both men had difficulty sleeping and had an itching sensation, watering eyes and headaches. Next morning, both had a red, sunburn-like rash over the exposed parts of their skin. Even in Portugal this is unusual in late December, especially for a local. Pedro did lose the rash more quickly than Michael, however – in just 48 hours as opposed to several days.

This fascinating case bothered me considerably. It seems very strange, but by mid-January I already knew what these men *must* have seen from reports made to BUFORA in the UK that night. A rocket component from a Soviet satellite (Cosmos 749) had burned up over Western Europe and was tracked crossing France and southern England in its final death throes around 9.08 pm. Parts of it may even have fallen into the sea off Essex. Witnesses spoke of its slow, steady path and a trail that lit the sky for several minutes. This surely was what these two witnesses in Portugal observed…

Except that much of their testimony makes no sense if that were the case. The rocket could not churn up the sea, as it was far too high – while, if that low, it could not have cleared the mountains. So this contradiction implies a misperception of the object's height.

Far more difficult to explain are the reported physiological effects and subsequent rash. This feature is surprisingly common in UFO close encounters and, quite independently, the airmen in Rendlesham described similar things when they closed onto the UFO in the woods that night. Here is what US airman John Burroughs described to me when we met in Arizona in 1989 and talked about his story for hours. It was before he went public with his account. As he approached the UFO: "It was like static electricity in the air and was very uncomfortable. I have never felt anything like that before. I felt really hot and my hair was standing up on the back of my head".

Two stories on the same night: 1,000 miles apart and with similar effects that could not obviously result from a rocket burning up high in the sky. Yet a rocket coincided exactly with the first sighting.

In early 1981, the BAA (British Astronomical Association) offered an intriguing first analysis of the Cosmos 749 burn-up. On that night of 25/26 December 1980 (when both the Paco de Arcos and Rendlesham cases occurred), the sky over the UK was awash with bright 'fireball' events. There were two in the hours before 749 arrived and another very spectacular one at 2.50am (brighter than the Moon and in view for four seconds). This one coincided with the first light seen 'falling into' the forest by the US airmen and very possibly led them into the woods toward a close encounter where they experienced similar physiological sensations to the men in Portugal.

There are a lot of coincidences here. But could another – stress reactions of all these men seeing meteors or space junk – explain the parts that the space debris cannot?

Initially, the BAA was puzzled by anomalies in the predicted track of Cosmos 749 and not convinced it was the cause, especially given coincident reports over Belgium and Germany. Yet it was hard to make those cases fit the Cosmos rocket that disintegrated over the UK. The BAA initially considered *two* fireball events at the same time on this already remarkable night – the second one being the cause of the otherwise anomalous sightings over Europe.

A later, and final, BAA verdict dropped these coincident sightings and focused on the cases that fitted into the Cosmos 749 burn-up path, logically concluding that this must be the cause. Even so, in 1994 BAA president John Mason acknowledged to me this was truly a most spectacular night for fireballs over the UK. He felt that there had to be a link between such a rare event and any spectacular UFO reported that night; so, he argued, the fireballs surely must explain the UFO cases.

This seems good sense and matches plenty of the evidence. Clearly, the witnesses in Portugal could have seen the Cosmos burn-up (though the BAA say burn-up began well to the north, over the Bay of Biscay). Given the timings, John Burroughs did not see this rocket, but feasibly entered the forest in response to the bright fireball at 2.50am, thought just to be a spectacular meteor.

A very credible solution… apart from those shared physical effects.

Fireballs and rocket parts burning up do cause UFO sightings. I have investigated dozens over the years where the source was clearly identifiable and we can usually be quite certain as to origin. Yet none features consistent side effects of the kind shared by these two cases on 25/26 December 1980.

John Mason of the BAA also noted that the Civil Aviation Authority had reports that night of an aircraft crew near Heathrow witnessing what was assumed to be the rocket burn-up. We also know that radar sources were examined after that report, though no correlation is known to have emerged. That weekend, following these unusual multiple events, radar operators were already inundated with reports. We will return to the radar evidence next month.

References to these rocket/meteor sightings kept on emerging during the early days of the Rendlesham investigation. Several sources in and around the base told us quite spontaneously that this 'night of fireballs' was crucial to the case, but would not say why.

An electronics engineer working at Martlesham Heath – where telecommunications and satellite research has long been carried out – also told Brenda and Dot that we should "remember the comets in the sky" that night as they could prove to be the key. Yet they did not say that this was because these were fireballs that had been misperceived – they hinted at something darker.

Then, Sgt John Burroughs – the first direct Rendlesham witness to openly talk to me – asked me questions about electrical energy and the nature of UAPs (unidentified atmospheric phenomena), which he knew I had investigated and felt could be connected with what he had seen. He added that the "meteor events in the sky… were important somehow", but, again, was not sure why.

Was it all just coincidence? Should we accept as the simplest answer that the meteors were crucial, at least in one way – that the space junk being misperceived was then reported as UFOs accompanied by extreme stressful reactions by those seeing it?

Or – as implied by my sources – might there be another kind of link? And if so, then what on Earth was going on here?

Ever since watching it on local television as a child in the 1950s, **ROB GANDY** dreamed of seeing the Abbots Bromley Horn Dance for himself. On 7 September 2015, his youthful wish came true: now in his 60s, he would finally enjoy the spectacle of costumed men in antlers performing strange ritual dances in Staffordshire...

CHRISTOPHER FURLONG / GETTY IMAGES

ROUND TH

Abbots Bromley is a village in East Staffordshire situated between Uttoxeter (to the north), Stafford (to the west), Burton-on-Trent (to the east) and Rugeley (to the south-west). It is at the centre of the area of ancient woodland that is – or rather was – Needwood Forest, at one time associated with Sir Gawain's Green Knight. Historically, the Normans introduced a system of royal forests designated for the hunting of wild deer by royalty, nobility and their acolytes. These did not necessarily consist entirely of woodland.[1] However, in 1803 an Act of Parliament allowed forestry commissioners to enclose lands and deforest them, and by 1811 Needwood Forest was divided amongst a number of claimants.[2] This was despite a long campaign against the enclosures, which included Francis Mundy's famous 'local' poem "Needwood Forest", published in 1776.[3] The result was that by 1851 its area was described as forming "one of the most beautiful and highly cultivated territories". The former woodland area now encloses some 20 farms, with Bagots Wood claimed as the largest remaining part of the forest. Two miles from Abbots Bromley is Blithfield (pronounced "Bliffield") Hall, which has been with the Bagot family since 1360. In 1953 the Blythe River was dammed to form a reservoir, now an attractive lake southeast of the house.[4]

Each year on Wakes Monday the famous Horn Dance takes place in the village and its environs. It represents the oldest traditional dance in England, its origins lost in antiquity. It is believed that the Dance was originally performed at the three-day Barthelmy Fair granted to the Abbots of Burton by Henry III in 1226, celebrating St Bartholomew's Day on 24 August. The correction of the Julian calendar in 1752 moved the Fair to the beginning of September, and over the years the three days became one. Now the Dance takes place on Wakes Monday, which is the Monday following the first Sunday after the Fourth of September. This means that the date varies from year to year and ranges between 6 and 12 September.[5] Confused? Well, you won't be alone: disappointed visitors often turn up on the wrong day. So if you plan to attend, make sure you check the local website, and book early if you need accommodation.[6]

HE HORNS

TOP: The Abbots Bromley Horn Dance photographed around 1900 outside St Nicholas Church. **BELOW:** The original Hobby Horse, now retired, is kept in the church.

THE DANCE

The Horn Dance starts at around 8am when the dancers have collected the horns from St Nicholas Church, where they are kept in the Hurst Chapel under the care of the vicar. The horns are first "danced" in front of the church, then on through the village, round some of the outlying farms, and out to Blithfield Hall for around midday. After refreshments, the horns are danced back again round other farms, returning to the village along the Uttoxeter Road at teatime. From then on till dusk, the Dance moves slowly through the village, concluding at the Market Place with its ancient Butter Cross. The horns are finally returned to the church just after 8pm. (See box for full route and timetable). The total distance covered is around 10 miles (16 km). In bygone years, the whole route was covered on foot, but more recently the dancers are ferried by car or van along certain stretches.

Traditionally the dancers are a band of 12, and always male (although girls have sometimes played the junior roles). Six men carry the six sets of antlers, accompanied by Maid Marian, the Hobby Horse, the Jester or Fool, a boy carrying a bow and arrow, another with a triangle on which he beats time, and a musician playing a melodeon (although in the past a fiddle was used, and nowadays there are usually two musicians, one playing accordion). There is no certainty about the origins of the latter characters but it is thought that in mediæval times they were commonly played by entertainers at banquets and similar events.

THE HORN DANCE IS PHYSICALLY VERY DEMANDING GIVEN THE SIZE AND WEIGHT OF THE ANTLERS

ROB GANDY

One item that is not removed from the church is an old, and now retired, version of the Hobby Horse that is too fragile – and too heavy – for continuing use. It has been replaced by a more manageable, lighter version. The original is thought to be about 200 years old, and apparently its head is made from an old broom head with the bristles removed and paint applied.

The dance has two distinct parts. One is a winding, single file that snakes its way forward, making ground gradually as the horn-bearers thread what looks like a figure-of-eight knot. The other is a stationary dance, formed by the chain winding into a wide circle, then flattening out to make two files facing one another. This latter part brings the three white horns opposite the three brown, while the Fool and Hobby Horse face Marian and the boy with the bow and arrow. The two lines advance, retire and cross sides, the "stags" lurching head-on at one another as if butting. The boy "fires" his arrow into the Hobby Horse's mouth, in an act that older residents always said was to keep out the Devil. The music was played for over 50 years by Doug Fowell, who died in 2006 having been involved in the Horn Dance for 71 years. He played a mixture of "old tunes" and "popular tunes" (including 'The Isle of Capri' and 'Nelly the Elephant'!) that had the required rhythm for the dance. Unfortunately, Doug had not written down

CHRISTOPHER FURLONG / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: The reindeer antlers have been carbon-dated to nearly 1,000 years old. **BELOW:** The author has a go, finding even the smallest set of antlers a challenge!

the "old tunes" and so current musicians listen to folklorist Doc Rowe's recordings of his playing and do their best to copy it.[7]

There are plenty of stops, with food and drink provided at every one. Alcohol is regularly available, but not always consumed (allegedly). What is certain is that the Dance is physically very demanding, particularly for the horn-bearers, given the size and weight of the antlers. They are inevitably of different sizes, and range between 29in (74cm) and 39in (99cm) across, and between 16¼ lb (7.4kg) and 25¼ lb (11.5kg) in weight. I had the privilege of trying out the smallest set, and can assure you that it's not easy to hold and carry, especially as the lower antlers bear heavily and sharply down on one's shoulders – the reason why the horn-bearers wear shoulder pads under their costumes. The distances covered and the nature of the dancing, often on roads, takes its toll on the knees, and so dancers often have to retire from the Dance around their 60th birthday. But this has not stopped the sprightly Jeff Bradbury, who is still going strong in his mid-sixties, after nearly 50 years of dancing.

The costumes worn by the dancers are comparatively modern. Originally, ordinary clothes were worn, with coloured ribbon or cloth attached, but just before Queen Victoria's Jubilee in 1887 the daughters of the then vicar of Abbots Bromley (John Manley Lowe Jnr) designed and made the first set of costumes. These were green tunics with brown spotted sleeves, and blue trousers

ROB GANDY

with brown spots, with the boys wearing red velveteen hats. These were replaced and added to in 1904, and in 1948 the then Lord and Lady Bagot provided new costumes. The present costumes for the horn-bearers have contrasting shirts and waistcoats: those carrying the white horns wear a rust-coloured oak leaf-patterned shirt with plain sleeves and a light green waistcoat, while those carrying the brown horns wear a light green oak leaf-patterned shirt with plain sleeves and a rust-coloured waistcoat. All wear tan coloured hats, light green trousers with oak leaf pattern, and long dark green socks. The others wear outfits specifically in line with their characters, with complementary colouring.

ANTLERS AND ORIGINS

It would be natural to presume that the Abbotts Bromley antlers are those of native deer, given the history of Royal forests. Surprisingly, they are from domesticated reindeer, extinct in England since before Saxon times, and the horns have been carbon-dated to 1065 plus or minus 80 years. Arguably the most likely source is Scandinavia, given that the area was invaded and settled by both Saxons and Danes, and the nearby River Trent would have provided a readily navigable route between Danish settlements and Norway and Denmark, via the Humber estuary. The horns have been painted white and brown, although the latter have also been blue at some time in the past. Their heads have every characteristic of 16th century carving.[8]

The horns never leave the village, except during the Dance itself, so when the Horn Dancers are invited to attend events further afield, they use replicas. This is probably fortunate: there's a story about the occasion on which they gave a performance in Burton-on-Trent – the home of British brewing – and got so hopelessly drunk that on the way home the spare horns (believed to be from elk) ended up in the River Trent and were lost.

Of course, the age of the horns does not necessarily mean that the Dance is of the same vintage. Unfortunately, the details of a country dance in a small Midlands village would not necessarily be seen as something of great historical import; but there is a reference to the Dance in 1686 which sets it as being performed "within memory" around Christmas-time, and being called the Hobby-horse dance. The quotation "within memory" is significant because it means that the Dance had been discontinued during the second half of the 17th century, due to the imposition of the post English Civil War, Puritan-inspired Commonwealth, when dancing and music were forbidden. That it existed before this period, between 1620 and 1630, is evidenced by the testimony of a distinguished judge, with a less reliable source suggesting that the Dance collected money for the needy "until the monasteries were suppressed in 1540". It is noteworthy that an 1125 Burton Abbey source tells of five Abbots Bromley men being given grazing rights in Needwood Forest for an annual rent of 10 shillings. The importance of this cannot be overstated, given that it would enable forage for domestic animals, and access to winter fuel, fruits and small game. Anyone caught inside the forest boundary without right of access would be accused of poaching, which was punishable by mutilation or even death. In the Middle Ages, a parade or demonstration was a recognised way of asserting or keeping alive privileges and customs, and therefore it is arguable that the Horn Dance served this purpose for the descendants of these men. Such an interpretation would trace the Dance back to Norman times.

COMPARISONS HAVE BEEN MADE WITH THE BUFFALO DANCE OF NORTH AMERICAN TRIBES OR THE NAVAJO DEER DANCE

While the Dance is local and specific to Abbots Bromley, this type of dance is universal; comparisons have been made with the buffalo dance of some North American tribes or the deer dance of the Navajo. In his book *Mysteries*, Colin Wilson draws parallels with the Floral Dance in Helston and the Festival of the Hobby Horse in Padstow, both in Cornwall, which he describes as fertility ceremonies involving men dressed as animals. The former includes a song concerning Robin Hood and Maid Marian, and Wilson quotes folklorist Lord Raglan identifying Robin Hood with a Celtic horned god. [9] Others believe that the Dance stems from Druidic fertility rituals and refer to similar festivals in rural France where men wear the horns of cattle and pursue the village girls. Suffice to say that if the origins of the Dance *do* relate to wild fertility rituals then its modern incarnation is far more conservative; and after a full day's dancing and drinking I doubt any of the performers would have the energy to indulge in chasing local wenches, even if they wanted to.

The local interpretation from farmers is that the Dance celebrates the gathering of the corn, and in light of its timing this seems very plausible. However, as nothing definitive has ever been written, the true meaning and origin of the Abbotts Bromley Horn Dance will remain a mystery.

A FAMILY TRADITION

The Dance has long been led by the Bentley and Fowell families in a tradition that goes back to at least 1800 and quite likely

CHRISTOPHER FURLONG / GETTY IMAGES

OLI SCARFF / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: The Abbots Bromley Dancers gather outside Blithfield Hall. **ABOVE:** Maid Marian, one of the traditional characters in the Dance, is played by a man.

earlier. In recent years the local 'Nostalgia Team' historical group has investigated source documents and established that the two families became linked in 1858, when William Bentley married Anne Fowell. Their eldest son, also named William, was born in 1857 and on Anne's early death he adopted her maiden name. William Jnr married Lucy Rock in 1882, producing seven sons and two daughters (more about four of the sons below). Since then, the involvement of the family has reduced, with now only Carl Fowell and his son Michael participating. This is in part due to the smaller size of families nowadays, and in part down to the fact that Doug Fowell had six daughters and no sons. Consequently, there is now a more diverse membership. Only four of the dancers live in Abbots Bromley itself, although the others all come from neighbouring towns and villages.

The Horn Dancers conduct their affairs themselves, with as little formality as possible, although the legal ownership of the horns was transferred to the local parish council in 1981, which thereby assumed responsibility for all future maintenance and repairs. The co-ordinator is Terry Bailey, one of the Abbots Bromley locals, who has been playing the Fool – so to speak – since 1979, when only three dancers were *not* Fowells. He explained that he only joined by accident; he'd gone along with some friends among the dancers, simply to watch, and found himself press-ganged into covering for the person who usually took the role of the Fool but had failed to turn up. "They told me to get the costume on and get on with it!" and Terry has been "getting on with it" admirably ever since. So while the traditional familial ties of the Dance have loosened over the years, these have been replaced by extremely strong community-based bonds.

What is clear is that a lot has been written about the Horn Dance which is simply wrong. I discovered this when I sent Terry a copy of a 1987 magazine article – in good faith – to save me asking him lots of questions he had already answered many times before. He had never heard of the authors or seen the article before – and much of it was incorrect. There is some local frustration about these examples of people who have evidently not attended the Dance, or spoken to the relevant personnel, copying or quoting inaccurate publications, and thus spreading the misinformation further. Television is not necessarily much better, with three minutes in Penelope Keith's *Hidden Villages* doing the Dance little justice. Doc Rowe has been photographing and recording the Horn Dance since 1973, and annually notes variations in personality and performance associated with this living tradition. What he, Terry and Tom Wheeldon of 'Nostalgia Team' stress is the need to respect the traditions and to go back to original sources wherever possible.

100 YEARS ON

The seventh of September 2015 was a gloriously sunny day in Abbots Bromley – which was a surprise given the awful weather that had swept across England the previous week. I got down to St Nicholas Church in time for the collection of the horns, as everyone prepared themselves for what Terry had told me was a special "one-off"

OTHER LOCAL FORTEANA

Set in rolling countryside, Abbots Bromley is a lovely place to visit even when the Horn Dance is not taking place, and has no less than four pubs. Nearby Blithfield Hall (pictured above), with the main house joined by battlement walls and a turreted gateway, is one of the oldest castles in England, and Blithfield Reservoir is a scenic spot. So if you have turned up on the wrong day, or are just passing through, what is there for a fortean to enjoy in the area?

Inevitably, there is an array of ghost stories. The Goat's Head is supposed to have had Dick Turpin as a guest, with a room being named after him, and it's claimed that he stole Black Bess from Rugeley Market during his stay. Legend has it that a local man sold his soul to the Devil in return for riches, and that Satan came and violently claimed it while he was in this very same pub; apparently, this shade can sometimes be heard shouting and swearing in the night, and black shapes are often glimpsed in the corridors.[10] Blithfield Hall itself has a whole battalion of spectres, including a grey lady, a lady wearing dark clothes and a cap, a male figure looking out of a first floor window twisting a ring on his right hand, and a small, spectral boy who fell down a well and can be heard giving voice to anguished screams.[11]

As a child visiting Blithfield Reservoir for a family picnic, I was told that the church bells from the sunken village could sometimes be heard ringing from under its waters. Imagine my disappointment, when researching this article, to find that there were only two buildings within the area that was flooded: a small thatched cottage and an old mill.[12] No church – and no village for that matter – but a perfect illustration of how stories can be passed down in good faith, when they have absolutely no basis in fact. The legend of sunken churches and their ghostly bells is so ubiquitous, though, that in this case it appears even to have attached itself to a newly created area of water.

FT conributor Nick Redfern tells a story about nearby Bagots Wood. In 1937, a 10-year-old local lad named Alfred Tipton was playing there with four friends when they were disturbed by a shrill screeching sound and saw a large black beast sitting on its haunches in a particularly large and very old tree. It was "shaking the branch up and down with its claws tightened around it". The creature peered at them for a few moments and then opened up large and shiny wings that were at least 12ft (3.6m) across. It then flew, or glided, away, before disappearing from view after 15 or 20 seconds. When shown pictures, photographs and drawings of a wide variety of large-winged creatures that either roam the skies, or did so in the past, the one that Alfred said most closely resembled the creature he and his friends had seen was a pterodactyl. Nick links the vision to the Mothman sightings in the USA and draws attention to strange and ominous animal mutilations in Bagots Wood in 1978.[13]

Just down the road is Rugeley, famous for William Palmer, known as 'The Rugeley Poisoner' and 'The Prince of Poisoners'. It was alleged that Palmer was responsible for as many as 15 murders, including those of his wife, four of his children, his brother and his mother-in-law. When he was hanged outside Stafford Prison on 14 June 1856 (specifically for the murder of John Parsons Cook) 35,000 spectators crammed the streets of the town to witness the grisly spectacle – some spending the whole night in pouring rain to secure their places.[14]

To the other side of Rugeley lies Cannock Chase, with its long history of fortean goings-on, including alien big cats, black dogs, bigfoot-type creatures, Pig-Man and werewolves.[15] Abbots Bromley and its surrounding area is definitely for the fortean tourist trail.

PHOTOS: DOC ROWE / DOC ROWE ARCHIVE

FACING PAGE TOP: Some of the dancers in the uniforms of the Lincolnshire Regiment. **FACING PAGE BOTTOM:** The Horn Dancers set off from Abbots Bromley on their traditional route. **LEFT:** The 2015 Horn Dance commemorated that of 1915, and these photographs show the original dancers and their contemporary counterparts.

version of the Horn Dance. This was because it was 100 years since the 1915 Horn Dance, when four of the seven Fowell brothers – Alfred, Arthur, David and John – were given special dispensation from the Lincolnshire Regiment of the British Army to go and do the Dance prior to embarkation for the Western Front. They performed the Dance in military uniform and then left for the front. Within the month, Arthur died of his wounds at the Battle of Loos (aged 25), and David was killed in action in April 1917 (aged 24). Alfred and John survived the War.

It was decided that four of the current dancers would wear replica 1915 Lincolnshire Regiment uniforms for the 2015 Dance, in honour of their predecessors. This gave the opportunity to recreate photographs from the 1915 Horn Dance in the same locations and from the same viewpoints.

In order to make the event as consistent as possible, the 1915 photographs were scrutinised to establish exactly which sets of horns were carried by which brothers; this was possible due to the specific characteristics of each set of horns. The uniforms and individualised badges bearing the name and photo of each brother were then assigned to those current dancers who carried the corresponding sets of horns. There is a hierarchy amongst the horn-bearers associated with their seniority and dance position; what was really rather fortean was that Carl and Michael Fowell – the only family links to the four brothers from the current dancers – were found to be carrying the same horns carried by Arthur and David in 1915 respectively.

After watching the initial dances on the village green in front of the Buttercross, and up Bagot Street, I went for breakfast while the dancers set off on their route. I'm not fit enough to follow the Dance for its whole course, and so my wife and I met up with the dancers across Blithfield reservoir in the village of Admaston, before walking to Blithfield Hall, where the Dance took place on the lawn and the dancers were presented to Mr Hyde, the current owner, and his party. After lunch we left the dancers as they set off to an outlying farm, and re-joined them when they came back into the village, slowly moving between pubs and the Indian Restaurant, each of which provided refreshments after the dance. Landlords, pub staff and spectators joined in, carrying some of the horns in informal dancing and generally having some fun. With one last trip around the outskirts of the village, the dancers returned to the village green at dusk for their final dances. Morris Men and other traditional dance groups had been providing some interim evening entertainment for the large crowd (probably about 2,000 people) gathered around the pubs and stalls. Finally, everyone returned to St Nicholas Church to return the horns and receive a blessing. Tom Wheeldon once again told the story of 1915, as he had done at every stop on the way.

Terry Bailey and his fellow dancers should be very proud of what they do every year, and particularly for this fitting tribute to their predecessors of 1915. They and the people of Abbots Bromley appreciate that the Horn Dance reaches back into the distant past, and are determined to ensure that it will continue long into the future. It provides a unique occasion for the expression of communal spirit and pride, and a recollection of 1,000 or more years of village life. I recommend it for every fortean's 'bucket-list'. FT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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PHOTO: CHRISTOPHER FURLONG / GETTY IMAGES

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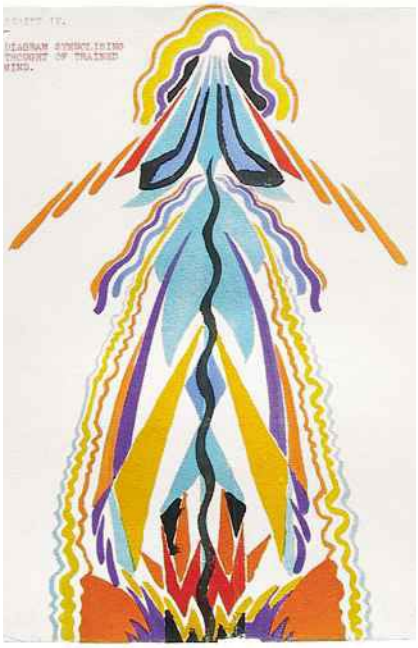
The Kindred of the Kibbo Kift

In 1920, a group of disaffected scoutmasters formed an organisation marked by bizarre costumes, esoteric ceremonies and leaders with names like 'Blue Falcon' and 'Deathwatch'. Its mission was to rescue the Western world from its industrialised modern nightmare through a regime of rambling, camping and mysticism. **ANNEBELLA POLLEN** uncovers the weird world of the Kibbo Kift...

If you had happened through the woods and country lanes of the south east of England on any weekend in the 1920s, you could easily have chanced upon a striking group of hikers marching in triangular formation, dressed in hooded cloaks and jerkins in shades of green, brown and grey, singing songs of their own composition under cryptic, colourful banners of abstract design. If you stopped to find out more, you might have been astonished to receive salutations in Anglo-Saxon and the new international language of Esperanto, and to be introduced to men and women with names like Blue Falcon and Batwing. While open-air pursuits such as rambling and camping grew dramatically in popularity in the interwar period, such an encounter would have been as arresting in its own time as it would be in ours, for the Kindred of the Kibbo Kift were no ordinary outdoor enthusiasts. If you were invited back to camp, the sight of members arrayed in futuristic ceremonial garb, alongside the enigmatic symbolism of their hand-decorated tents and their crudely carved totems might have finally convinced you that this was – in the group's own words – a "confraternity" of elites and not "a tennis club".

What was the Kibbo Kift? John Hargrave, the group's founder-leader, asserted in typically flamboyant style that such a question was ultimately unanswerable, yet it was one that needed to be asked again and again by group members as well as strangers. Beginning with the challenge of their unfamiliar name – taken from an antiquarian dictionary of colloquial Cheshire terminology, and meaning 'proof of strength' – and continuing into their outlandish visual style and remarkably diverse and ever-shifting purposes and practices, Kibbo Kift's sometimes bewildering aims and methods ranged across health and handicraft, pacifism and propaganda, myth and magic, education and economics. Kibbo Kift was far more than an all-ages, co-educational alternative to the Scouts; the wide range of their interests and the large scale of their ambitions were necessitated, they believed, by the peculiar conditions of their time: so-called civilisation had been corrupted and was on the brink of collapse; the mass 'mechanised death' of the Great War had demonstrated the logical outcome of industrial modernisation; dynamic new dreams were needed to overcome the nightmares of early 20th century existence.



CIVILISATION HAD BEEN CORRUPTED AND WAS ON THE BRINK OF COLLAPSE

While Kibbo Kift was undoubtedly highly idiosyncratic and its numbers relatively small – never rising to many more than a thousand members in total, and never more

LEFT: 'Diagram Symbolising Thought of Trained Mind' by John Hargrave, c.1924. **FACING PAGE:** The 'Slaying of Summer' seasonal ceremony, c.1928.

KIBBO KIFT FOUNDATION / COURTESY OF JUDGE SMITH

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PHOTOS: KIBBO KIFT FOUNDATION / LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS LIBRARY

ABOVE LEFT: Ruth Hargrave (Minobi) in Camp Fire dress, in front of a tent bearing an Aleister Crowley inscription. **ABOVE CENTRE:** Cecil Watt Paul Jones (Old Mole) consecrating Old Sarum banner on the Wessex Pilgrimage, 1929. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Kinsman with rucksack, c.1928. **BELOW:** Kibbo Kift Easter Hike through the Home Counties, 1931.

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than a few hundred at any one time – the group made a distinctive contribution to English oppositional culture in the heady moment of the 1920s between world war and economic crisis, where radical change was called for and radical experiments were welcomed. Kibbo Kift's offer, however marginal it may seem in retrospect, attracted the attention and support of an impressive range of high-profile campaigners, writers, politicians and visionaries, from HG Wells to DH Lawrence, who lent their endorsement, if not their membership, to the group. While Kibbo Kift's unique revivalist-futurist Utopia never came to pass, it nonetheless offered a comprehensive vision for designing social change, and one that has some remarkable resonances with present-day concerns, nearly 100 years after Kibbo Kift's founding.

Among Kibbo Kift's characteristically sweeping aims was nothing less than the restoration of spiritual values to a material world. The regular calendar activities of the group, from council meetings to camps and hikes, were each imbued with an elevated, sanctified quality through the group's innovative use of woodcraft ceremony. On a practical level this offered a disciplined mode of outdoor operation that opposed military organisational tactics, but at a more profound level it expressed Kibbo Kift's deep-rooted interest in comparative religion, its pantheistic belief in the spiritual immanence of all things – not least in the ancient rural English landscape – and a modern world infused with the myths and mysteries of an earlier, more 'primitive', age. Kibbo Kift's membership of "more than usually conscious individuals" comprised a range of seekers of spiritual as well as social solutions to contemporary problems and these included mystics of various stripes. Kibbo Kift's 'inner aspect' has been very little examined – indeed, as hidden knowledge, it was sometimes intentionally concealed from prying eyes – but investigation of the group's occult character reveals a great deal of Kibbo Kift's intellectual influences and core spiritual purpose.

THE WORLD CRUSADE

In his 1927 book *The Confession of the Kibbo Kift,* Hargrave argued: "In every country, folklore and myth abound in references to groups of god-heroes which, in many cases, represent deified men". Hargrave positioned Kibbo Kift among them. He also listed the various traditions from which, he admitted, Kibbo Kift had "stolen the magic":

The narrow feudalism of Japan's ancient Samurai caste may be totally out-of-date, but their self-sacrifice and their self-control are necessary to-day…

We may say that the ancient Spartans were cruel and ferocious, but there is still a place for hardy endurance and physical fitness.

Many of us look somewhat askance at the 'occult mysteries' and alchemical absurdities of the 15th century Illuminati, but we must remember their determined quest for light.

Our ideas of 'chivalry' have undergone a change, but the fortitude, enthusiasm, and fraternal code of honour of the Knights of the Table Round are still a necessity in this our

modern world of wireless and typewriters.

Ours is a different 'crusade', yet that crusading spirit and adventurous questing of the Knights Templar cannot be put aside as done with. We have a quest for 'light'; for scientific light, and we have our World Crusade for the Holy Sepulchre of Unity.

Of all his borrowings, Hargrave was most inspired by the myths of Rosicrucianism, a mystical, secret brotherhood of the Middle Ages. As 'Highly-illuminated Men', the Brethren of the Rosie Cross were famed as the keepers of hidden mysteries. Kibbo Kift literature drew on the 17th century writing of scholar and priest Robert Burton from *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, where he had noted: "We had need of some general visitor in our age that should reform what is amiss – a just army of Rosie-cross men – for they will amend all matters (they say) in religion, policy, manners, with arts, sciences, etc." Hargrave saw that need still unaddressed in the 20th century, and positioned Kibbo Kift as an equivalent "society of operative philosophers", similarly intent on bringing "the Universal and General Reformation of the Whole Wide World".

Hargrave, and many of his followers, had extensive knowledge of world religions and historical spiritual systems as well as 20th century esoteric practices; those who did not were expected to acquire it. Readings and tasks were set and monthly potted summaries were given in regular features in Kibbo Kift's internal magazines. To have mastered a branch of art, science or philosophy was part of the wider duties of membership, and was no less demanding than the all-night silent hikes, winter camping and 30lb (14kg) rucksack-carrying trials that were also to be undertaken. Fitness of mind, body and spirit was encouraged. Hargrave urged: "I expect every Kinsman over 15 or 16 years of age who hears such words as: — *Al Quran; Gautama; Tao; prayer-wheel; I AM; Vedic; taboo; Shinto; symbolic; Alchemy; Zoroastrianism*, to know to what they refer, and to be able to fit the meaning into the general development of Human Ideas."

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TOP: Kinsmen at Stonehenge on the Wessex Pilgrimage of 1929.

'THE GREAT WORK' OF THE KIBBO KIFT ORGANISATION WAS MAGICAL AS WELL AS PRACTICAL

Among the many questions listed in the group literature that attempted to explain the wide-ranging, sometimes contradictory and often changing beliefs and policies of the Kindred, one asked if the group was a "sort of secret society". The answer given was a decisive "No".

In *The Confession*, Hargrave firmly dismissed occultism, stating: "Let those who turn tables, read thoughts, speak with tongues, gaze into crystals, and do other operations of a like nature turn away. There is nothing here for them. This is no mystical cult, occult clique nor magical fraternity. Nor is it a secret nor semi-secret society." In typical paradoxical style, however, Hargrave also asserted, in the same breath: "The operative magus does not proclaim his initiation, disclaims 'occult powers' and admits that he 'knows nothing'." In this, Hargrave enacts the statement by occultist Aleister Crowley, utilised in Kibbo Kift rituals: "The word is spoken and concealed: The meaning hidden and revealed!"

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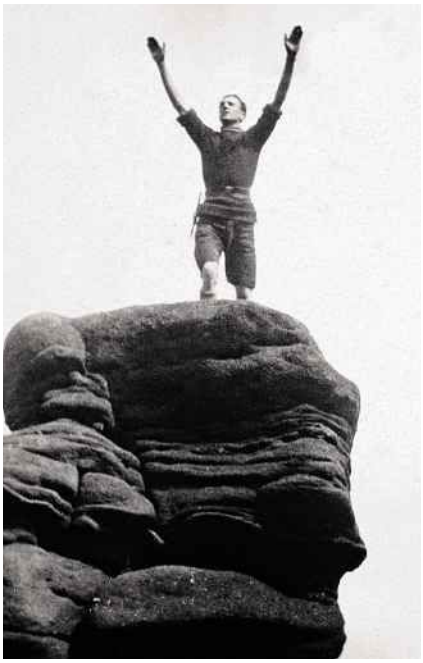

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TOP: Consecration of the Long Man of Wilmington banner, 1929. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Kinsman on a tor, c.1924.

THE EDENSFOLK

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In detailing and then dismissing occult powers, Hargrave highlighted his extensive knowledge. This can be seen most directly in the practices of Hargrave's seven-strong lodge (or 'Eremitical Conclave'), the Ndembo. Established in 1919 in part as a means to excise a radical new organisation from the Boy Scouts, the sub-group had a strongly esoteric character. Continuing into the Kibbo Kift years, its existence rather undermined Hargrave's public claims that Kibbo Kift was nothing like a secret society. Via private rituals, conducted monthly at the full Moon and also in the mysterious 'Taboo Tent' at Kibbo Kift gatherings, Hargrave's closest and most trusted friends and advisors were initiated into allegiance to this 'holy order' of the Egyptian 'Sacred Beetle', in order to carry out what was frequently called 'the Great Work'. This term was used publicly as a dramatic way of describing the conglomeration of Kibbo Kift's various reformist purposes, but it had its origins in occult texts, such as Eliphas Levi's *Transcendental Magic: Its Doctrine and Ritual*, which Hargrave referred to in his Kibbo Kift writings. Although rarely made explicit, 'the Great Work' of the organisation was fundamentally magical as well as practical.

The name and some of the purposes of the Ndembo had been drawn from Lewis Spence's *Encyclopaedia of Occultism*, another of Hargrave's key reference works. Here it was characterised as a secret society of the lower Congo, whose initiation takes the form of a death and resurrection ritual. Spence explained: "Those who have gone through this rite are known as *Nganga*, or 'the knowing ones'." Elements of other 'secret societies' were also borrowed from Spence to furnish Hargrave's lodge; from the 'Egbo of Calabar', the title of 'The Idem' for 'spirit master' was added. This was merged with a range of ideas filtered through rituals and magical terminology adapted from Freemasonry, the Order of the Golden Dawn and other Western hermetic traditions.

Hargrave was closely familiar with Theosophy, which utilised elements of masonic ritual and structure for their new religious practices. The Theosophical Society, founded in New York in 1875, offered a highly influential system of metaphysical enquiry or 'occult science', inspired by eastern mysticism and apparently based on ancient wisdom, in pursuit of a Universal Brotherhood (see **FT302:32-37**). It appealed to a broad range of social progressives and spiritual seekers in the late 19th and early 20th century mystical revival, who overlapped with the vegetarians and pacifists of early Kibbo Kift. Several prominent Kibbo Kift members and supporters were committed Theosophists, including former suffragette Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence and Baron Van Pallandt, the Dutch Scout master who in the early 1920s was torn as to whether to leave his substantial personal fortune to Hargrave or Jiddu Krishnamurti, Theosophy's appointed 'World Teacher' (Pallandt chose the latter).

The structures and organisation of Freemasonry were also a significant influence on the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, a select but influential group of women and men of arts and letters first established in the 1880s. Founded by three Freemasons, the Golden Dawn is credited with single-handedly reviving the Rosicrucian ritual magic tradition with a distinctively modern sensibility. Ndembo initiatory rites, originally conducted in secret but later openly deposited in Kibbo Kift archives, drew on characteristics of both historical and contemporary mystical organisations; indeed, the opening pages of their *Chronicle* reproduces the 10-point grade structure of the Golden Dawn. Many Ndembo ritual practices and terminology endure in 21st century forms of occultism, from the casting of a ritual circle in a hallowed 'Place of Working', the banishing and invocation of unwanted and wanted spirits, the consecration of the Four Quarters with water and salt, the ceremonial breaking of bread and sprinkling of earth, and the rousing affirmative cry of "So Mote it Be!" Together these indicate that Kibbo Kift must be understood in the context

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ABOVE: John Hargrave as White Fox Spirit Chief with children at Dexter Farm Tribal Training Camp II, 1928. **TOP:** John Hargrave's White Fox totem, c.1928.

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ABOVE: Body of Gleeman and Gleemaidens at the Gleemote of 1928.

of the development of British mysticism in the 20th century.

James Webb (see **FT150:34-38**), author of the eminently scholarly twin volumes *The Occult Underground* (1974) and *The Occult Establishment* (1976), interviewed Hargrave in the last years of his life and was the first to position Kibbo Kift among what he described as 'Edensfolk', that is, the eclectic reformers, idealists, anti-materialists and nature revivalists who shared what he described as an "illuminated viewpoint", that is, "an interest in the religious, the mystical, and the occult". Other attempts to trace Kibbo Kift's place in occult networks sprang up in the mid- to late 1990s as heated debates developed about whether Wicca – the practice of witchcraft – was best characterised as a new spiritual formation rather than as an 'Old Religion'. Gerald Gardner, commonly characterised as establishing and popularising from the mid-20th century onwards the rituals and practices that underpin modern neo-paganism, claimed to have been initiated into knowledge by a mysterious hereditary coven in the New Forest in the early 1950s. As the claim of an unbroken line of witches reaching back to antiquity is hardly taken seriously by anyone, pagan enthusiasts and scholars, including Ronald Hutton, have suggested the British woodcraft movement as an alternative source for Gardner's ideas. The Order of Woodcraft Chivalry – another pacifist splinter group from the Scouts – has been the most common focus, not least because of the proximity of its grounds to the New Forest. The Order's Chieftain in the early 1920s, Harry 'Dion' Byngham, was of a distinctly pagan bent and his earnest – if ultimately short-lived – attempts at inserting an ecstatic, nudist and sexually liberated Dionysian aspect into the Quaker educational organisation have been examined as a possible connection between woodcraft groups and the later practices of Gardner.

Kibbo Kift's contributions to British mysticism have been less well-explored. Some researchers searching for occult links in woodcraft organisations have tended either to rely on secondary sources or to extrapolate – sometimes wildly – from a few suggestive glimpses at archival fragments. Those who have consulted Hargrave's publications are encouraged by his veiled pronouncements, and especially by his later turn to faith healing, but are ultimately left unsatisfied by Kibbo Kift's magic qualities. This is in part due to the hidden nature of the knowledge that they seek, but substantial documentary evidence is available for those willing to take the time to consult it. Following several years of research into hundreds of boxes and thousands of documents across public and private archives, the full range of Kibbo Kift culture is now revealed for the first time. As the first full-length book to explore the group's mystical-modernist artistic style and spiritual belief, *The Kindred of the Kibbo Kift: Intellectual Barbarians* – alongside its accompanying exhibition at Whitechapel Gallery, London – offers new information about Kibbo Kift's occult relationships, philosophies and practices, and enriches understanding of the use and application of occult ideas in early 20th century Britain. FT

- The book, *The Kindred of the Kibbo Kift: Intellectual Barbarians* is written by Annebella Pollen, designed by Roland Brauchli and published by Donlon Books. http://donlonbooks.com/products/the-kindred-of-the-kibbo-kift-intellectual-barbarians-by-annebella-pollen.

- The exhibition, *Intellectual Barbarians: The Kibbo Kift Kindred*, is co-curated by Annebella Pollen and Nayia Yiakoumaki, and can be seen at Whitechapel Gallery, London, until 13 March 2016. www.whitechapelgallery.org/exhibitions/intellectual-barbarians-the-kibbo-kift-kindred/

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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THE WIZARD OF THE EDGE

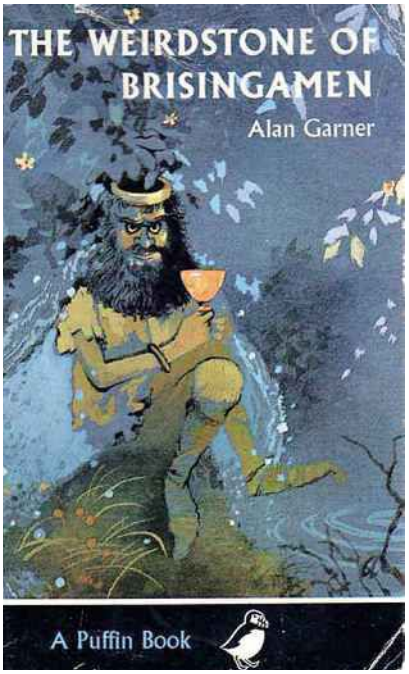
BOB FISCHER looks forward to a new anthology of appreciation for the work of Alan Garner, whose novels of folklore, myth and magic have enthralled generations of readers.

"At dawn one still October day in the long ago of the world, across the hill of Alderley, a farmer from Moberley was riding to Macclesfield fair."

It's a drizzly, autumnal afternoon, sometime in October or November 1983, and a softly-spoken primary school teacher, all drooping moustache and bifocals, grips a battered paperback and begins reading the above passage aloud to a whispering gaggle of 10-year-old children. Some are restless, most are entranced; at least one is entirely unaware of the profound impact the book is to have upon his life. And yet, as a sheet of rain dissipates against the library window and *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* plunges swiftly into a murky world of lost magic, dark forces and twisted folklore, I gradually begin to realise that I have found my Favourite Writer In The World.

It might be 32 years since the inspirational Mr Millward read Alan Garner's debut novel to me and my snotty-nosed classmates, but in the intervening three decades my opinion has never faltered. Ever since that fateful afternoon, Garner's books have been a constant in my life, not just shoved onto a shelf or piled upon a bedside table, but almost woven into the very fabric of my being; whether as a dreamy schoolboy excitedly searching for Svarts and Mara in the tangled woodland of my native North Yorkshire Moors, or as a beardy fortysomething, keen to research the long-lost folk tales of the very same windswept landscapes.

Garner's work is primal, hypnotic and essential. I can't imagine life without it, any more than I can imagine life without oxygen, water or Chocolate Hobnobs. And I *really* like Chocolate Hobnobs. When I read books like *Weirdstone* and its soulful, feminine sequel, *The Moon of Gomrath*,



EVER SINCE THAT FATEFUL AFTERNOON IN 1983, GARNER'S BOOKS HAVE BEEN A CONSTANT IN MY LIFE

when I revisit the suburban weirdness of *Elidor* and the simmering, sensual myth cycle of *The Owl Service*, they occupy my thoughts to the virtual exclusion of everything else around me. Mundane existence feels pale and grey; Garner's books are thrillingly alive.

And then there are the later works: *Strandloper*, *Thursbitch* and *Bonelan;* the last of which, published in 2012, unexpectedly completed the *Weirdstone* trilogy five decades after the saga had begun. Infused with complex themes of loss, grief and fractured time, these books have proved as profoundly affecting to adult readers as *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* was to those of us whose childhoods it illuminated. Garner's readers have, in every imaginable sense, grown up alongside him.

Alan Garner turned 80 in 2014, and, to celebrate, a new anthology of appreciations of his work has been compiled by writer and journalist Erica Wagner. Entitled *First Light*, it collects together essays, poems and similarly creative tributes from the likes of Stephen Fry, Philip Pullman, Neil Gaiman, Susan Cooper and David Almond.

"Alan Garner is really a unique literary figure," Erica tells me, on another rainy weekday afternoon. "And one thing that's worth saying is how many different kinds of people – writers, historians and scientists – have been drawn to his work over the years. So it wasn't hard to come up with a list of people that we might approach to contribute. And somehow I was not surprised when, really, everyone that we thought to ask agreed to do it. And that's a sign of how important Alan Garner has been; not just to them, but to a broader reading and literary culture."

Curiously, unlike most of her contributors, Erica's childhood was completely untouched by Garner's work, and she offers up the entirely reasonable excuse of being born and raised in Manhattan.

"I came to Britain as a late teenager, so I didn't grow up with Alan's books," she says. "I discovered his work as an adult, and I can only imagine what their effect would have

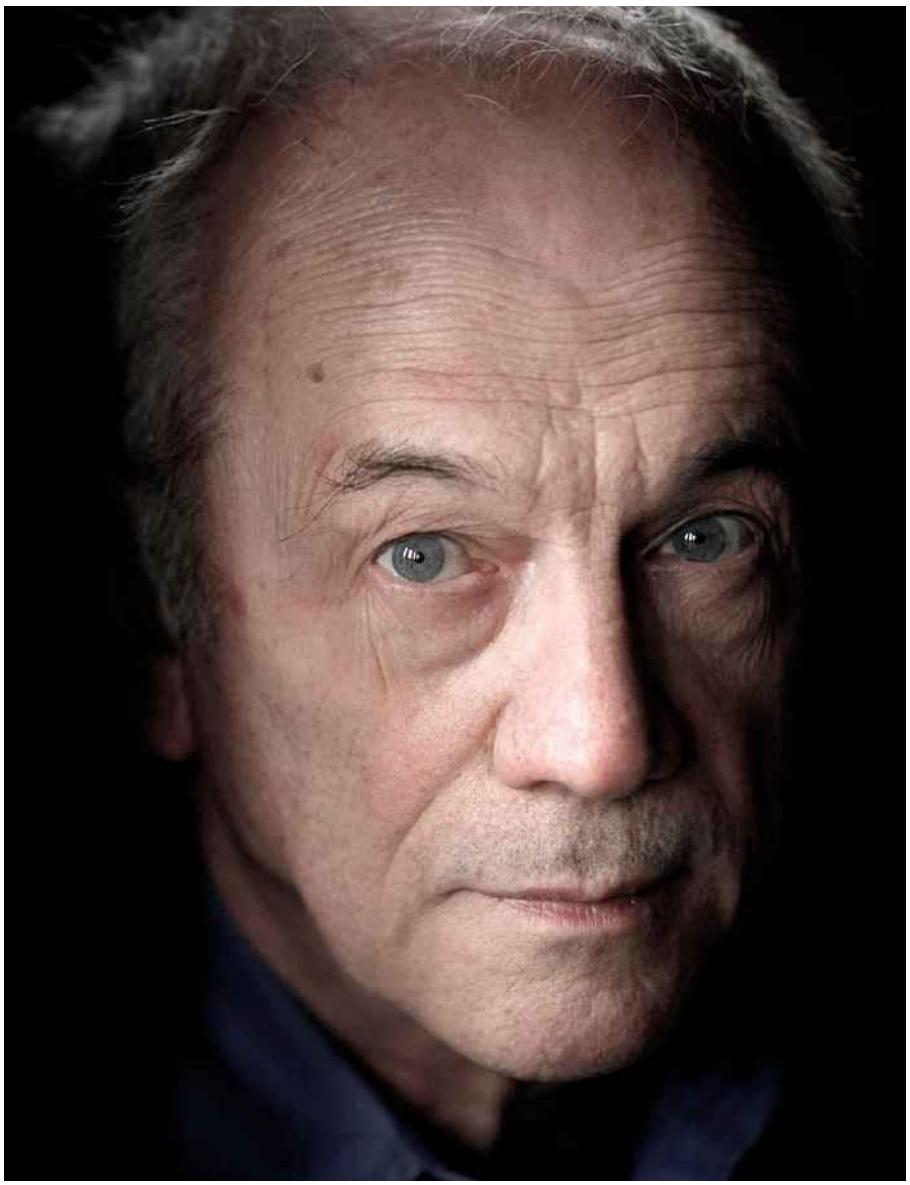
been on me if I'd read them when I was 10 or 11. The first book of his that I read was a reissue of *The Stone Book Quartet* in the late 1990s. At the time, I was editor of the *Times Literary Supplement*, and – of course – every book that was ever published came across my desk at one time or another. Thinking that I was a terribly well educated person, I found myself asking 'Gosh, what is this book that's being called a classic? I've never heard of this book, I've never heard of this author… what's going on?' So I started to read… and that was it. My life changed.

"Maybe the reason I came to Britain is that I wanted access to another world. I was interested in folklore and mythology, and I felt it was much closer to the surface in Britain. Much more available. So when I discovered Alan's work, it just spoke to me as the thing that I'd been looking for."

Originally published between 1976 and 1978, *The Stone Book Quartet* comprises four short novels – *The Stone Book, Tom Fobble's Day*, *Granny Reardun* and *The Aimer Gate* – and is arguably the most overt manifestation of the roots of Garner's work; grounded as it is in the landscape and architecture of his native Alderley Edge and infused with a sense of his own family history.

"Alan comes from a very interesting and unusual place in modern culture," says Erica. "He comes from a family of craftsmen. Always rooted in one place, living a kind of ancient life, up until the early 20th century. And then Alan went to Manchester Grammar School, he went to Oxford to study Classics… so he has two kinds of knowledge in his head: the ancient knowledge of where he and his family come from, but then he also has book knowledge. And I think there is, in his books, a kind of fissure; a bridge that always has to be crossed. And I think that's expressive of that balance. There are always two worlds in Alan's books. And how those two worlds interact with each other is different every time."

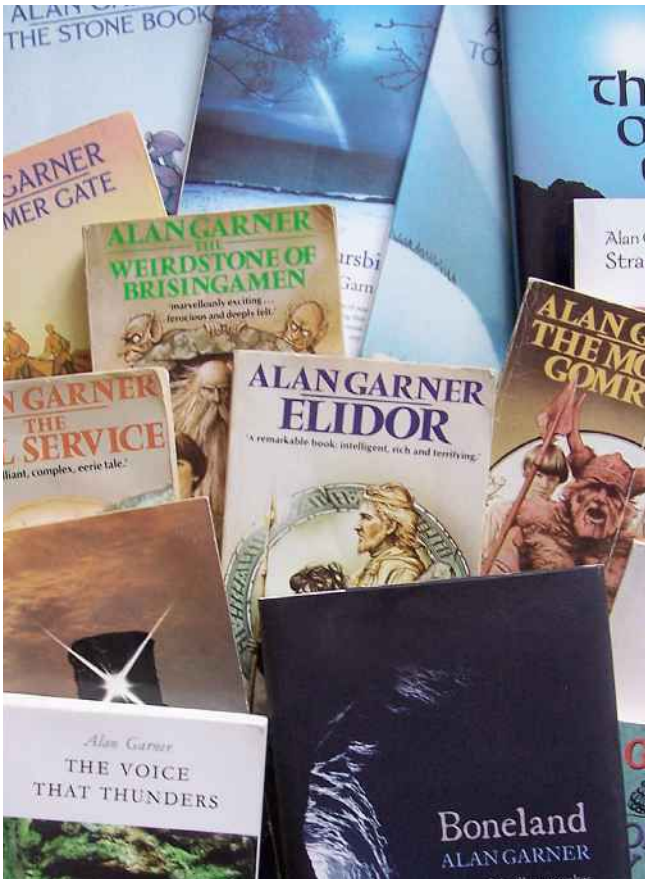
Even as a 10-year-old in 1983, sitting at Mr Millward's feet in Levendale Primary School library, I found that this sense of duality was the major contributory factor in drawing me inexorably into Garner's world. In the early books, that "bridge" is the crossing point from the humdrum to the fantastical; it's the unassuming rock that conceals the magical gates of Fundindelve; it's the derelict church in a Manchester slum that provides the portal to the nightmarish realm of *Elidor*. But more than that, it's the *Weirdstone*'s anorak-sporting hikers, wandering idly through the Cheshire countryside, who turn out, as we discover, to be warlocks steeped in ancient, dark magic. It's a unicorn loose in an alleyway by a railway line, a Welsh myth cycle manifested in a sabotaged motorbike, a vengeful Celtic spirit unleashed by the excavation of a pub car park. Like the ancient folklore from which he so often takes his inspiration, Garner's fantasy is not 'elsewhere', in some fictional land – it's here, and now, and living



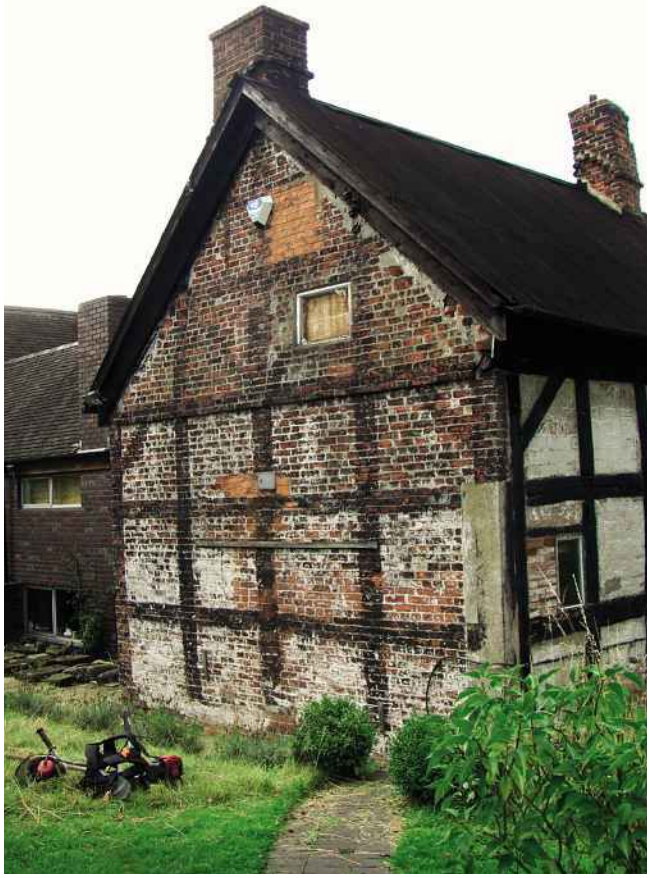
GARY CALTON

MARTIN V MORRIS / CREATIVE COMMONS

TOP: Alan Garner. **ABOVE:** Alderley Edge, Cheshire, the landscape that has inspired much of Garner's fiction.



BOB FISCHER



MIDNIGHTBLUEOWL

ABOVE LEFT: Some of Garner's books. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Toad Hall, Blackden, the house Garner renovated and in which he completed his first novel. **BELOW:** Erica Wagner.

with us: beneath every stone, within every hollow tree trunk, lurking in the corner of the attic, behind the water tank.

Within a year of my epiphany on that rainy autumnal weekday, I'd read the first five of Garner's novels, up to and including *Red Shift*, a personal literary journey that straddled the terrifying transfer from the warm enclaves of my primary school to the stark, alien bleakness of secondary education. And, looking back, I see the complex passage from childhood to adolescence as another recurring theme in these older books, perhaps a further explanation for my all-encompassing obsession with them at the time. There are echoes of it in Susan's painful longing for womanhood in *The Moon of Gomrath*; it's a driving force behind *Elidor*'s textbook "youngest child" Rowland, desperately craving to be taken seriously by his elder siblings; and it positively boils over in the fractious teenage tensions of *The Owl Service*.

"Yes," agrees Erica, "the other two worlds are the worlds of childhood and adulthood. It's frightening. And we don't talk much about that; we talk about practical things: sexuality, doing your GCSEs, what happens when you go on a date. But my son is 15. And I remember being 15, dimly, and it's really scary. And I think a lot of what Alan does is a metaphor for how scary that is.

"Stephen Fry says in *First Light* that when he first read Alan Garner he felt trusted by the books. And I think that's a very interesting point. One thing that Alan Garner never does is talk down to his readers. His books, which deal in most cases with pretty dark, dangerous and scary stuff, know that these are things that young people think about, and are able to deal with. *Need* to deal with, indeed. You feel like you're in a serious partnership with Alan Garner when you're reading his books. You and the author are on a really important journey together. And I think that's something that all of these pieces have in common; they're all describing a partnership with an author." Those of us who have had our lives transformed by Garner's work know that it's a partnership that lasts a lifetime.

First Light will be produced by the crowd-funded publisher Unbound, and pre-orders can be placed at *unbound.co.uk/books/alangarner*. A percentage of the proceeds will go to the Blackden Trust, the educational charity founded by the Garner family to preserve and research the extraordinary historical site that they call home. Further details can be found at *theblackdentrust.org.uk*. FT

> "YOU'RE IN A SERIOUS PARTNERSHIP WITH ALAN GARNER WHEN YOU'RE READING HIS BOOKS," SAYS ERICA

JANIE AIREY

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

BOB FISCHER is a freelance writer, and a radio presenter for BBC Tees. He has previously written for FT on the subject of North Yorkshire's hobs and tweets as @bob_fischer.

Life after death

TO KNOW WHERE YOU'RE GOING IS TO KNOW WHERE YOU'VE BEEN

Based on the erosion process 'solid rock to boulders to pebbles to sand' our great scholars collectively agreed that to form all the sand in the world would take a thousand million years, an aeon, and confirmed "This Planet Must Be Old"

Dictionary – Sand – *Created over the past half billion years.*

From this point onwards everything known to the history of Mankind was constructed. Deeptime was born; sedimentation rates, dinosaurs, fossil record, evolution, plate tectonics, are all dated from this old planet perspective. Combined facts that give radioactivity there atomic readings.

However' an aeon to form the entire world's sand is totally wrong because beach pebbles are formed by the process of tidemark, they get bigger not smaller. Every dirty tide leaves a mark, a dirty stain over the previous hardened and scuffed stain, broken layers clearly seen if one wishes to see them. A sea-basin is just like a dirty washbasin and the mechanics are fully explained in this powerful and detailed book.

Consequently the foundation for an old planet and therefore radiometric dating is wrong. Sand has come from our missing landscapes, from places like the Grand Canyon and the Great Butts of Arizona, removed when the forming limestone was still soft and mud-like.

The steep sides of these canyons and gorges tell us how the pyramids were built and knowing how the pyramids were built tells yet another story, a story quite opposed to evolution. It seems circumstances prevailed that took mankind on a course down to animal rather than the other way around.

But is RT right? Only a closer inspection of the humble beach pebble will call for a geological recount.

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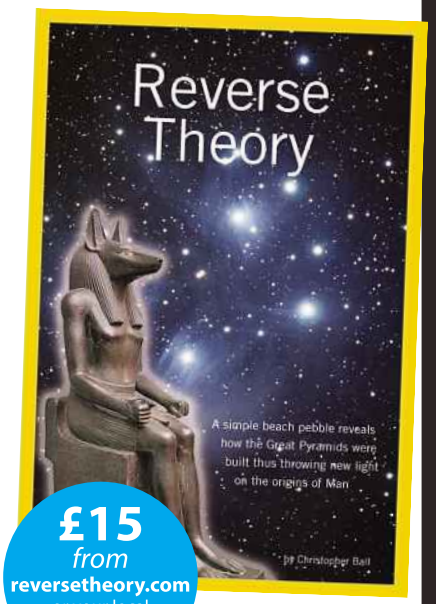
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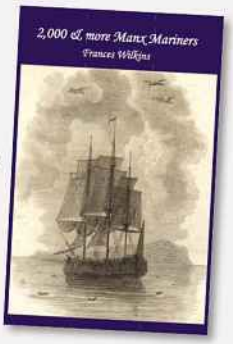

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FORBIDDEN FRUIT

GENERAL GORDON AND THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

General Gordon died at the Siege of Khartoum in 1885. He is remembered as a great British military hero, but less well known is his obsession with locating the Garden of Eden, which he thought he'd discovered in the Seychelles. **KARL SHUKER** examines a botanical folly of biblical proportions...

The Fairy smiled, and led him into a large and lofty room, the walls of which appeared transparent… In the middle of the room stood a tree, with luxuriant hanging branches, on which golden apples, large and small, appeared amongst the green leaves. This was the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, of the fruit of which Adam and Eve had eaten. From each leaf dripped a bright red dew-drop, as if the tree were shedding tears of blood.

Hans Christian Andersen, 'The Garden of Paradise', in *Hans Andersen's Fairy Tales*

January 2016 marks the 131st anniversary of the death of one of Britain's greatest military heroes – General Charles Gordon (1833-1885). Actually attaining the rank of Major-General during a long and distinguished military career, he will forever be remembered for his many acts of outstanding bravery on the battlefield. Not least of these was his valiant stand against the Mahdi's forces during the relentlessly violent Siege of Khartoum (13 March 1884 to 26 January 1885) in Sudan that finally claimed his life and those of so many of his men as well as numerous civilians while awaiting the arrival there of a tardy relief force. In stark contrast, however, it is nowadays all but forgotten that he also held a highly unexpected but passionate belief relating to a certain tropical island and its botanical wonders.

IT WAS NOTHING LESS THAN A SEED FROM THE FRUIT OF THE GARDEN OF EDEN'S TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

At the end of their 10-day honeymoon spent on North Island in the Republic of Seychelles during May 2011, the UK's Prince William and his bride the former Kate Middleton (now Their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge) received from this 115-island nation's foreign minister Jean-Paul Adam a very unusual honeymoon souvenir – the enormous 'double coconut' of the coco-de-mer tree, endemic to a handful of islands in the Seychelles archipelago. The remarkable likeness in shape of this tree's bilobed seed to a certain part of a lady's anatomy is (in)famous, so the royal honeymooners may well have been aware of it too – but would they also have been aware, I wonder, of its alleged biblical link? Specifically, would they have realised that, at least in the opinion of one very notable figure, they were now the owners of nothing less than a seed from the fruit of the Garden of Eden's Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil – the very same fruit that fatefully tempted Eve and then Adam too, causing them to be banished by God from Eden forever?

I SHOULD COCO

The coco-de-mer *Lodoicea maldivica* (sometimes referred as *Lodicea sechellarum*, but this is a junior synonym) is unquestionably one of the most iconic

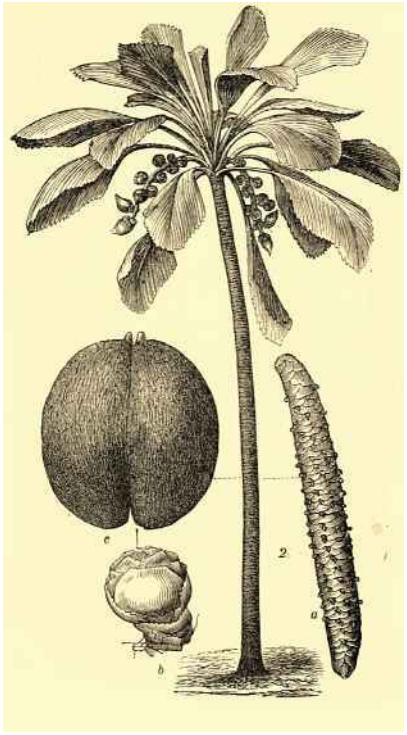
LEFT: A fanciful illustration of Gordon's death. **FACING PAGE:** A fine specimen of a coco-de-mer.

BUENA VISTA IMAGES / GETTY IMAGES

species native to the Seychelles. Today, it occurs principally upon just a single major island – Praslin, the group's second-largest member, roughly 8 miles (13km) long. It formerly existed on several smaller isles too, all close to Praslin, but today it survives on only one of these, Curieuse, situated just off Praslin's northern coast, and is officially categorised by the IUCN as endangered. Additionally, therefore, it has been deliberately introduced to certain other Seychelles islands in order to establish new populations, thus assisting in its conservation. Belonging to the palm tree family Arecaceæ, the coco-de-mer is the only member of the genus *Lodoicea*, coined for it by French naturalist Jacques Julien Houtou de Labillardière and generally believed to commemorate Laodice, the most beautiful daughter of Troy's King Priam (although a few researchers have suggested the French King Louis XV as a possible alternative name-source, 'Lodoicus' being Latin for 'Louis').

The coco-de-mer is a dioecious species (male and female flowers occur on separate trees), it can grow to 100ft (30m) tall or more (with male trees being taller than females), takes 25-50 years to reach maturity, lives for well over a century (its maximum lifespan is still unknown), and sports huge, fan-shaped, leathery leaves, pale-green in colour, measuring up to 46ft (14m) across, 13ft (4m) long, and capturing as much as 98 per cent of all rainfall. However, its most noteworthy claim to fame, earning this tree species a place in the record books, is its gigantic fruit (shaped like a normal, single coconut) containing the huge bilobed 'double coconut' seed, which is the largest seed produced by any species of plant.

Produced by female coco-de-mer trees, the fruit measures 16-20in (40-50cm) across, weighs 33-66lb (15-30kg) (up to 39lb/18kg



of which is the weight of the seed inside it), and takes six to seven years to mature, plus a minimum of two further years to germinate. The seed's bilobed shape infamously lends it more than a passing resemblance in form to a woman's buttocks on one side and to her stomach and thighs on the other side (resulting in it becoming a potent fertility symbol in the Seychelles and also nurturing a traditional belief there that its pulpy white meat possesses powerful aphrodisiac properties). And as if this wasn't sufficiently suggestive, male coco-de-mer trees produce very sizeable catkin-like inflorescences (measuring up to 3ft/90cm long) that are decidedly phallic in shape. Not surprisingly, these distinctive features have given rise to some very colourful local legends, including the popular folk-belief that on wild stormy nights the male trees uproot themselves, pair up with the still-rooted female trees, and engage in passionate love-making under the cover of darkness.

The coco-de-mer's fruit is so heavy that whenever one falls into the sea, it is unable to float, sinking straight to the sea bottom instead, where it gradually rots, the husk falling away and the internal seed breaking down and releasing gas, which enables this now-hollow, bare, and much lighter structure to rise to the surface of the sea and float great distances, carried by the current. Because the seed is no longer fertile, however, even if it reaches land it cannot germinate and give rise to a tree (thus explaining this species' extremely limited distribution). However, so spectacular is its outward form that several centuries ago these seeds would command enormous prices as greatly prized curiosities among the more wealthy collectors, or were presented as gifts to royalty (a tradition upheld with William and Kate).

The Seychelles first became known to the West via Portuguese explorer Vasco de Gama's recorded sighting of these islands in 1502, and the coco-de-mer tree itself was formally discovered in 1768 by a French engineer named Barré, who was sent to explore Praslin following France's acquisition of this archipelago during the 1740s. Long before these events, however, this tree's spectacular seed was well known to fishermen in such diverse localities as the Maldives, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and India. This is because hollow, internally rotted specimens were sometimes carried by the sea from the Seychelles to the shores of these and other countries with Indian Ocean

ROBERTO SCHMIDT / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

TOP: A 19th-century illustration of the coco-de-mer. **ABOVE:** The Seychelles – an archipelago of islands visited by General Gordon in 1881.

ABOVE: General Gordon (below) believed that the coco-de-mer was the Garden of Eden's Tree of Knowledge and that he had even found the location of the biblical site.

coastlines. Indeed, it was the finding of such seeds around the Maldives that led to the mistaken belief among some early naturalists that the tree that produced them must exist somewhere here, thus earning it the *maldivica* portion of its binomial taxonomic name.

Moreover, the seeds' presence on the sea surface led the fishermen to believe that they must have originated from some majestic form of underwater tree ('coco-de-mer' is French for 'sea coconut'), growing in stately splendour beneath the waves. Some even believed that a griffin-like monster-bird deity called Garuda lived in this subaquatic tree's mighty branches, whence it would periodically rise up to hunt elephants and tigers – complete fantasy, yet still being reiterated, albeit sceptically, as recently as the 1700s by the likes of German botanist Georg Eberhard Rumpf (aka Rumphius) in his six-volume magnum opus, the *Herbarium Amboinense*, published posthumously in 1741, almost 40 years after his death.

GORDON'S GARDEN

Strange as these notions might seem, however, an even stranger one would not only be aired but also fervently supported by a notable historical figure during the late 1800s: the celebrated British army officer and diplomat Major-General Charles George Gordon, "Gordon of Khartoum". His avowed if highly eccentric belief was that the coco-de-mer tree was in fact the Garden of Eden's Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. But how and why did he come to believe in such an extraordinary notion?

Spurred on by his deeply-held religious beliefs as an evangelical Christian, Gordon

had long been passionately (some would even say obsessively) interested in attempting to track down present-day localities that might correspond to various significant sites described in the Bible – in particular the Garden of Eden.

Traditionally, the favoured sites among those who believe that the Garden of Eden truly existed have been in the Middle East, two of the most popular suggestions being a location at the head of the Persian Gulf or one close to Tabriz in Iranian Azerbaijan. As for the Tree of Knowledge: scholars considering it to have been real rather than merely symbolic have typically supported conservative, non-controversial identities, such as a species of fig tree or apple tree. Gordon, however, nurtured radically different ideas.

During the early 1880s, he spent time in Mauritius as Commander of the Royal Engineers, and in 1881 he visited the Seychelles archipelago (then part of the Crown Colony of Mauritius), about 1,000 miles (1,600km) further north, on a military engagement. This was of particular interest to him for non-military reasons, because his Kabbalistic scrutiny of the Book of Genesis, coupled with his knowledge of geography and place-name etymology, had indicated to him that here might be clues to Eden's location. Gordon subscribed to what was then the popular theory that a once-mighty but now-sunken continent called Lemuria formerly spanned the Indian Ocean from Madagascar to India, and when he entered a lush green valley on Praslin known today as the Vallée de Mai (May Valley), he became convinced that this idyllic tropical location was a last surviving remnant of the Garden of Eden, with the remainder now lying beneath the waves near to Praslin. Moreover, as he gazed up in stupefied awe at its forest of magnificent coco-de-mer trees, present in profusion and towering above him on every side in this magical, secluded place, he felt certain that these wondrous plants were the direct descendants of the original Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil present in Eden at the very beginning of the world.

Indeed, Gordon deemed it likely that the coco-de-mer seed's suggestive form would have contributed to the temptation that the Tree of Knowledge's forbidden fruit represented. For, as he was later to comment to leading British botanist Sir William T Thiselton-Dyer, at that time the assistant

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director at Kew's Royal Botanic Gardens: "The fruit is shaped like the human heart, the bud or stem which attaches it to the branch like the male organ of generation. When the husk is taken off, the inner double nut [i.e. seed] is like the belly or thigh of a woman… In a word, its lines are those of the male and female organs of generation, and it is a fruit which cannot fail to attract attention by any one seeing it."

Evidently warming to his theme, in his records Gordon also wrote: "Externally the coco-de-mer represents the belly and thighs, the true seat of carnal desires… [which] caused the plague of our forefathers in the Garden of Eden."

Lending further support to this grandiose notion, at least according to Gordon, was the fact that these trees even possessed their very own Serpent – in reality, a 3ft (90cm)-long species of green snake that can frequently be found living amid their foliage.

Nor was that all. Gordon also considered the breadfruit trees *Artocarpus altilis* present on Praslin to be descended from Eden's original Tree of Life, whose fruit had sustained Adam and Eve during their time in the Garden. For as he already knew well, breadfruit was a staple food not only in the Seychelles but also in Mauritius, as well as many other locations around the world.

Yet if Praslin's Vallée de Mai was truly derived from the Garden of Eden, how could its presence in the middle of the Indian Ocean be explained? Easily, in Gordon's view – because he considered Praslin and the other Seychelles islands to be remnants of the vanished continent of Lemuria, which, he believed, had existed at the world's beginning but had sunk forever beneath the waves during the Great Flood.

AN UNCONVINCING EDEN

So taken was Gordon with his identification of Eden as having existed just offshore of Praslin, with the Vallée de Mai its last surviving portion, and the coco-de-mer as the Tree of Knowledge, with its immense fruit the still-existing instrument of humanity's fall and expulsion from Eden at the dawn of time, that he wrote various articles and corresponded with a number of authorities, including those at Kew in 1882, as well as William Scott – director of the Royal Botanic Gardens in Pamplemousses, near Port Louis, Mauritius – concerning his eccentric beliefs. He also sent specimens of the coco-de-mer and breadfruit tree fruits to Kew, and even

GENERAL GORDON WROTE TO A NUMBER OF AUTHORITIES CONCERNING HIS ECCENTRIC BELIEFS

prepared a detailed map in which he linked Praslin to the four rivers mentioned in the Bible as landmarks for Eden. Unsurprisingly, however, his beliefs were not greeted with enthusiasm from contemporary scientists and writers. In particular, Gordon's concept of the coco-de-mer with its gargantuan double coconut as a plausible contender for the Tree of Knowledge was swiftly and robustly dismissed by his critics.

After all, as pointed out very reasonably by writer and onetime Seychelles resident H Watley Estridge, for instance, how was Eve meant to climb to the top of a 100ft (30m)-tall tree and carry down with her a fruit almost 2ft (60cm) across and weighing up to 66lb (30kg – heavier than three bowling balls!), and then take a bite through its immensely hard, 4in (10cm)-thick husk before offering it to Adam? True, she might have sought one that had already fallen to the ground (although the Bible specifically states that Eve had stretched out her hand and plucked a fruit – clearly implying that she had taken it directly from the tree). Or, as Gordon deftly represented in a detailed drawing, the afore-mentioned green snake associated with coco-de-mer trees on Praslin could have made its way up the tree to fetch one for Eve (always assuming of course that such a modest-sized reptile possessed the strength and dexterity to carry it back down to her after securing one). Yet the considerable problem posed by Adam and Eve lacking the necessary density of dentition to avoid breaking their

ABOVE: The male inflorescence and ripe fruits of the coc-de-mer, painted by Marianne North in 1883.

ALBERTO PIZZOLI / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

TOP: Young Coco-de-Mer Palms in the Vallée de Mai forest, Praslin Island, General Gordon's candidate for the Garden of Eden and now a UNESCO Heritage site.

teeth when attempting to bite through its rock-hard exterior and equally firm kernel inside seemingly defied resolution – even the resourceful Gordon was at a loss to provide a satisfactory response!

Equally, how could the breadfruit tree be descended from Eden's Tree of Life when it wasn't even endemic to the Seychelles? This species' ancestral, wild homeland was New Guinea (and possibly the Moluccas and Philippines too), from where it was subsequently introduced to many Polynesian islands, beginning around 3,000 years ago, and from these to the Caribbean by the French during the late 18th century, and thence to the Maldives, the Seychelles, Mauritius, Madagascar, Africa, much of Asia, Central and South America, northern Australia, and southern Florida. As for Lemuria, what physical proof was there to support the theory that this supposedly lost continent had ever existed? None, at least as far as the scientific world was – and still is – concerned, with no known geological formation under the Indian Ocean corresponding to Lemuria, and with the discontinuities in biogeography that the concept of Lemuria seemed to explain during the 1800s later being rendered obsolete by modern theories of continental drift and plate tectonics.

Following Gordon's tragic death in 1885, his idiosyncratic theories regarding Eden, its Tree of Knowledge, and their supposed link to the Seychelles fell into disrepute and were swiftly discarded, scarcely even referred to, let alone documented in detail, in modern-day publications – until now.

Nevertheless, the magic and mystery surrounding the coco-de-mer lives on. For with ultimate, bare-faced irony, the species whose female trees notoriously produce enormous, unashamedly lewd seeds that impersonate a woman's pelvis and whose male trees infamously yield huge, decidedly phallic inflorescences laden with pollen, has never revealed how its pollination is actually effected in the wild state. Is the male tree's pollen simply dispersed by the wind (anemophily), or is pollination a zoophilous process (i.e. involving animals, perhaps insects, or birds, or bats, or even reptiles)? How deliciously delightful it would be if the coco-de-mer's pollinator proved to be none other than the green snake that lurks amid its foliage – or the Tree of Knowledge propagated by the Serpent, as Gordon might have described such a discovery. Yet not even Gordon, surely, could ever have imagined anything quite as fortean as that! FT

NOTE

Strictly speaking, a nut is defined as a specific category of fruit – one that possesses a hard shell (the husk) and a seed inside. However, in general parlance the term 'nut' is also often used in reference to a hard-walled edible seed (as is the term 'kernel'). Consequently, in this article I have sought to avoid using the ambiguous term 'nut' in favour of the non-interchangeable terms 'fruit' for the combination of outer shell and inner seed, and 'seed' for the seed itself. Also, 'double coconut' is a term applied specifically and famously to the coco-de-mer's bilobed seed, so I have employed it here with this same meaning.

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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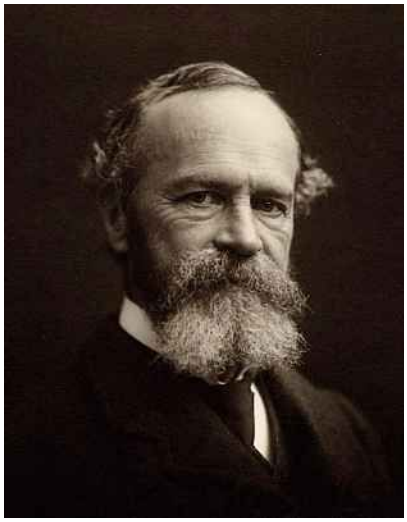
THE HIEROPHANT'S APPRENTICE PRESENTS

BUILDING A FORTEAN LIBRARY

7. NOTHING BUT, OR SOMETHING MORE?

Titles like *The Will to Believe* and *The Varieties of Religious Experience* ought, one would think, to excite the interest of forteans. Time, then, to hang out their shingle and make with some drum. Their author is William James (1842–1910), physiologist, psychologist and philosopher; also brother of the novelist Henry James. His matter in both these books is mainly religion, but without theology: he concentrates rather on religious apprehension and intuition which, he believed, if understood aright, led to a richer and more fulfilling life. But this is not dry stuff. In his day James was a forerunner of such as Timothy Leary, *sans* the triviality and banality: intrigued by mystical states, he willingly ingested peyote and nitrous oxide – with hilarious results. His conviction that humans have souls led him to study spiritualism, and he became a founding member and vice-president of the American Society for Psychic Research (whose work he discusses in *The Will to Believe*), which gives him another claim to forteans' attention.

William James was hardly the first, but was probably the most interesting, of those 19th-thinkers who reacted unsympathetically to the claim that scientific endeavour would, or even could, eventually 'explain everything' and by implication solve all the world's puzzles and problems. James (as have many others after him) pointed out that to take the rationalist, super-logical, materialist – and fundamentally utilitarian – outlook as the only realistic way to view the world is to deny actual everyday human experience. As he puts it in the chapter 'The Reality of the Unseen' in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, "[I]f we look on man's whole mental life as it exists, on the life of men that lies in them apart from their learning and science, and that they inwardly and privately follow, we have to confess that the part of it of which rationalism can give an account is relatively superficial. It is the part that has the prestige undoubtedly, for it has the loquacity, it can challenge you for proofs, and chop logic, and put you down with words. But it will fail to convince or convert you all the same, if your dumb intuitions are opposed to its conclusions. If you have intuitions at all, they come from a deeper level of your nature than the loquacious level which rationalism inhabits. Your whole subconscious life, your impulses, your faiths, your needs, your divinations, have prepared the premises, of which your consciousness now feels the weight of the result; and something in you absolutely knows that that result must be truer than



any logic-chopping rationalistic talk, however clever, that may contradict it."

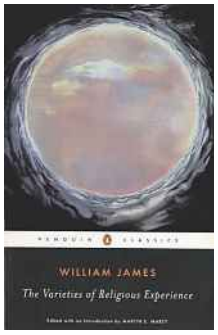
So James reasons after a dispassionate analysis of various mediums' accounts, reports of 'psychic' experiences, and religious revelations. "We may now lay it down as certain," he says, "that in the distinctively religious sphere of experience, many persons… possess the objects of their belief, not in the form of mere conceptions which their intellect accepts as true, but rather in the form of quasi-sensible realities directly apprehended." But, as noted, his instances range beyond the religious. This breadth of evidence allows him to say: "The whole universe of concrete objects, as we know them, swims… for all of us, in a wider and higher universe of abstract ideas, that lend it its significance... Such ideas, and others equally abstract, form the background for all our facts, the fountain-head of all the possibilities we conceive of." This is not far from Michael Polanyi's concept of tacit knowledge, and his insistence that we gain objective knowledge (scientific or otherwise) only by exercising subjective value judgements.

James has a chapter called 'The Divided Self', which title will intrigue those of a certain age for whom RD Laing's tract of that name – along with the yet more bizarre *The Politics of Experience* and *The Bird of Paradise* – was once a sacred text. Old hippies will be downcast or reassured to discover that James here treats of the inner discord between impulse (or appetite) and self-control (or morality), and its resolution into equilibrium. He says much of interest about St Augustine, but does emphasise that the religious solution to such inner conflict is but one possibility; it is only one aspect of "a general psychological process", and may go the other way entirely, from strictness and inhibition to unbridled licence – wa-hoo! – for instance.

Not to be missed is the long chapter on mysticism, which gives a cornucopia of reports of the mystic state, and touches on his own experience with nitrous oxide. From which, he concluded, "our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different. We may go through life without suspecting their existence; but apply the requisite stimulus, and at a touch they are there in all their completeness, definite types of mentality which probably somewhere have their field of application and adaptation. No account of the universe in its totality can be final which leaves these other forms of consciousness quite disregarded. How to regard them is the question… Yet they may determine attitudes though they cannot furnish formulas, and open a region though they fail to give a map. At any rate, they forbid a premature closing of our accounts

with reality. Looking back on my own experiences, they all converge towards a kind of insight to which I cannot help ascribing some metaphysical significance. The keynote of it is invariably a reconciliation. It is as if the opposites of the world, whose contradictoriness and conflict make all our difficulties and troubles, were melted into unity. Not only do they, as contrasted species, belong to one and the same genus, but one of the species, the nobler and better one, is itself the genus, and so soaks up and absorbs its opposite into itself. This is a dark saying, I know, when thus expressed in terms of common logic, but I cannot wholly escape from its authority."

James nonetheless observes that: "The fact is that the mystical feeling of enlargement, union, and emancipation has no specific intellectual content whatever of its own. It is capable of forming matrimonial alliances with material furnished by the most diverse philosophies and theologies, provided only they can find a place in their framework for its peculiar emotional mood. We have no right, therefore, to invoke its prestige as distinctively in favor of any special belief…" On the other hand, "the existence of mystical states absolutely overthrows the pretension of non-mystical states to be the sole and ultimate dictators of what we may believe."



As for scientism, James says in his 'Conclusions' (which, incidentally, it does no harm to read before the rest of the book): "To describe the world with all the various feelings of the individual pinch of destiny, all the various spiritual attitudes, left out from the description – they being as describable as anything else – would be something like offering a printed bill of fare as the equivalent for a solid meal." We have commented before in these pages on the sterility of the science-versus-religion 'debate'; James is an expert witness that militant atheism's dismissal of the non-rational, immaterial or spiritual life *and its value* is worse than ignorant: it is mendacious.

The Will to Believe was gathered together five years before *Varieties* (delivered as lectures in 1901). It's an anthology of papers given before various professional and student societies, and ranges from reflections on physiology – which manages to veer into theism and gnosticism on its travels – to whether life is worth living, determinism, great men (Thomas Carlyle was still a force to be reckoned with, even 20-odd years *post-mortem*), moral philosophy, Hegelianism, and 'What Psychical Research Has Achieved'. This last has dated a bit, and is slightly credulous, but full of insight.

It is all worth reading, and some of the presentations expand on themes that James compressed in the later work. For example, if you ever want a quote with which to bash scientism, try this for concision and urbanity: "There is included in human nature an ingrained naturalism and materialism of mind which can only admit facts that are actually tangible. Of this sort of mind the entity called 'science' is the idol. Fondness for the word 'scientist' is one of the notes by which you may know its votaries; and its short way of killing any opinion that it disbelieves in is to call it 'unscientific'. It must be granted that there is no slight excuse for this. Science has made such glorious leaps in the last 300 years, and extended our knowledge of nature so enormously both in general and in detail; men of science, moreover, have as a class displayed such admirable virtues, that it is no wonder if the worshippers of science lose their head. In this very University, accordingly, I have heard more than one teacher say that all the fundamental conceptions of truth have already been found by science, and that the future has only the details of the picture to fill in. But the slightest reflection on the real conditions will suffice to show how barbaric such notions are. They show such a lack of scientific imagination, that it is hard to see how one who is actively advancing any part of science can make a mistake so crude."

> THE MOST ENJOYABLE BOOK IN THE WORLD IS THE PHONE BOOK, BECAUSE THINK OF ALL THE SEX THAT WENT INTO CREATING THE CONTENT
> *Jarod Kintz*

Elsewhere he says drily: "A Beethoven string-quartet is truly, as some one has said, a scraping of horses' tails on cats' bowels, and may be exhaustively described in such terms; but the application of this description in no way precludes the simultaneous applicability of an entirely different description."

But for sustained entertainment, turn to the chapter 'On Some Hegelisms'. Hegel's works are hardly side-splitting stuff, but James puts on a near-slapstick turn in sticking a huge pin into the side of the ghastly old windbag, "a mind monstrous even in its native Germany, where mental excess is endemic". As James says: "Hegel's philosophy mingles mountain-loads of corruption with its scanty merits, and must, now that it has become quasi-official, make ready to defend itself as well as to attack others." And so James girds his loins, despite his judgement that Hegel's "system resembles a mouse-trap, in which if you once pass the door you may be lost forever. Safety lies in not entering." There is much more, dismantling with unremitting glee what – for Hegel – passes as thought. A typical flight: "But, hark! What wondrous strain is this that steals upon his ear? Incoherence itself, may it not be the very sort of coherence I require? Muddle! Is it anything but a peculiar sort of transparency? … Is friction other than a kind of lubrication? Is not a chasm a filling?" And so Hegel's vacuous edifice begins to tumble...

Sadly, most of these demolitions are too lengthy to quote here, but James really clobbers Hegel in recounting the "perfect delirium of theoretic rapture" (which "to the sober reader seem[s] meaningless drivel") that overcame him when intoxicated with nitrous oxide. James – desperately scribbling notes the while – was drenched in a shower of Hegel-lite oppositions and ostensible syntheses. "The most coherent and articulate sentence which came was this: – 'There are no differences but differences of degree between different degrees of difference and no difference.' This phrase has the true Hegelian ring…" Laughing gas indeed. After this extended *jeu d'esprit*, James concludes that Hegel's "identification of contradictories, so far from being the self-developing process which Hegel supposes, is really a self-consuming process, passing from the less to the more abstract, and terminating either in a laugh at the ultimate nothingness, or in a mood of vertiginous amazement at a meaningless infinity."

Now why, one wonders, weren't we directed to this uproarious *Zerstörungfest* when we were aspiring *philosophes* at Varsity? Never mind. These books are part of the deep background of forteana, worth anyone's time to read in exploring the variety of anomalous experience. FT

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THE DEAD HAND OF THE STATE

What exactly was up with Doc, asks **SD TUCKER** as he revisits the political graveyard that was 1960s Haiti in search of the zombie President in a bow toe and top hat.

Our Doc,
Who art in the National Palace for life,
Hallowed be Thy name by present and future generations,
Thy will be done at Port-au-Prince and in the provinces.
Give us this day our new Haiti,
And never forgive the trespasses of the anti-patriots
Who every day spit upon our country;
Let them succumb to temptations,
And under the weight of their venom
Deliver them not from any evil,
Amen.[1]

That is not quite the standard version of the Lord's Prayer that most of us will have been taught at school; but then most of us did not attend school in Haiti during the insane 14-year rule of François 'Papa Doc' Duvalier, the most unapologetically macabre dictator the world has ever known. Dressed from head to toe in black, wearing a tall, stovepipe-style undertaker's hat, a tiny bow-tie and dark sunglasses to hide his eyes, Papa Doc certainly made an indelible impression upon all those who saw him. Even if you were only able to hear him on the radio – and you would hear little else, as by law every programme broadcast had to be about him, or so it has been alleged –[2] Papa Doc's ominous tones were still utterly unmistakable; he deliberately adopted a deep, nasal whisper in order to give the impression that his communications were coming direct from the spirit-world. This was no mere eccentricity, though; instead, it was all part of a deliberate policy to intimidate the people. Papa Doc, you see, was pretending to be possessed by the Lord of the Dead.

Or was he? There is no doubt whatsoever that Doc consciously modelled his public image upon that of Baron Samedi, Haiti's skeletal, top-hatted, shades-wearing 'God of the Graveyard'. But was he merely imitating this figure for his own gain, or did he actually come to believe his own propaganda? There is plenty of evidence that Duvalier really did believe in black magic and his ability to contact the dead. As a young man, he wrote a book about Haiti's native religion, Vodou or Voodoo, although during his first steps into public life it seemed as if he'd left such interests behind him in favour of the more noble calling of medical science. Qualifying as a physician in 1934, Duvalier spent time studying abroad before returning to his impoverished island home in 1943 as part of a US-sponsored public health programme aimed at combating hideous tropical diseases like malaria and typhus. His grateful patients gave him the affectionate nickname 'Papa Doc' ('Daddy Doctor'), which he liked so much he never really stopped using it. By 1949, this apparently benevolent figure was Haiti's Health Minister; and when he ran for President in 1957, his landslide victory was no surprise.

KEYSTONE / GETTY IMAGES

PAPA DOC WAS PRETENDING TO BE POSSESSED BY THE LORD OF THE DEAD

The key event sometimes thought to mark Duvalier's transformation from Hippocrates to Harold Shipman was the massive heart attack he suffered in May 1959. Prior to this, Duvalier had been content to rule largely on a platform of racial populism, claiming to be the champion of the poor, black masses against the mixed-race 'mulatto' elite who had governed Haiti for years. After his health scare, though, people around Duvalier noticed changes in his personality. He had become paranoid and strange; seeing that he'd been unconscious for nine hours following his cardiac arrest, people began to suspect that Duvalier had suffered severe neurological damage of some kind.[3] Was this the true reason for his subsequent adoption of the guise of Baron Samedi? Both Duvalier's heart attack and his status as a doctor could plausibly be said to have fed into the idea that he was able to channel the Baron. After all, Samedi occupies the designated role of 'psychopomp' or 'soul-guide' in Vodou; when a believer dies, the Baron is said to lead them safely to the underworld and ensure that his corpse rots properly in the ground so that it cannot later be resurrected as a zombie. Samedi is also, though, a healer – just as Papa Doc once was. If he has a good enough reason, it is said that Samedi can cure a person of any illness or injury. Seeing as Duvalier was effectively 'dead' for nine hours, it is easy to see how his disciples might later begin to concoct fables about this fact. Did Duvalier meet with Samedi during his period of unconsciousness, it could be asked; and, if so, then why was he allowed to rise again? Had he been chosen by the Baron for some special purpose – as his avatar on Earth, maybe? This is the kind of self-glorifying, propagandistic myth that money just can't buy – it's no wonder Doc chose to exploit it for all it was worth. Haitians were used to worshipping an all-powerful figure with the power to choose who

MICHAEL ROUGIER / THE LIFE PICTURE COLLECTION / GETTY IMAGES

LEFT: A dapper Papa Doc rides through the streets of Port-au-Prince streets, gun at the ready.

would live and who would die. Now, he could even address them over the radio. [4]

ZOMBIE NATION

The trouble with coming to a definite decision about whether or not Papa Doc really believed he was the Earthly vessel of Baron Samedi, though, is that much of the evidence can be taken both ways. This can be seen most clearly in Duvalier's rather strange reputed attitude towards his opponents' severed heads. One of the most famous tales about Doc's rule was that he had the corpse of one of his enemies, Blucher Philogène, decapitated and the head taken to his palace in Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince. There, it was said that he kept it in a cupboard, removing it on occasion to consult with the dead man's spirit, which supposedly had the power to tell the future and predict coup attempts. As far as I can tell, though, there are no eyewitness accounts of Papa Doc/Baron Samedi actually doing this. What there *are* eyewitness accounts of, though, is the death of Blucher Philogène on the battlefield in 1963. Apparently thinking he was invulnerable to bullets, the rebel leader ran straight into machine-gun fire and was killed instantly. When Doc heard of this event himself, though, he really does appear to have ordered that Philogène's head be preserved in an ice-bucket, immediately sending out a military aircraft to retrieve it for him. [5]

But *why* did he do this? Maybe it was just to gloat. After all, stories about him enjoying watching his opponents being tortured and dissolved alive in acid-baths are legion. Or perhaps he just sent for Philogène's head for propaganda purposes, knowing full well the types of usefully scary story that would inevitably emerge. On the other hand, consider the tale told by the half-Haitian novelist Nick Stone, whose aunt Therese was one of Duvalier's personal secretaries. One day there was yet another coup attempt, it seems, and the American ambassador had called Papa Doc's palace wanting to know what was going on. Entering a meeting-room to ask her boss for the latest, Therese was surprised to see Duvalier seated at the top of a long table, surrounded by several of his most loyal militia leaders, all of whom seemed to be in some kind of trance. She passed on the ambassador's message, and Duvalier reassured her there was no danger. "Tell the ambassador I have the head of the coup here with me at the moment," the dictator supposedly quipped like a low-rent Bond villain, indicating a severed cranium placed on the table in front of him. [6] This certainly *sounds* as if some kind of sinister ritual was going on in the room; but again, we cannot be quite sure. Read, for example, the text of a pamphlet released by Doc's government in 1964: "Dr François Duvalier will fulfil his sacrosanct mission. He has crushed and will always crush the attempts of the opposition. Think well, renegades. Here is the fate awaiting you and your kind." Below was printed a photograph of three detached heads from dead anti-Duvalier guerrillas that Doc had had placed on public display at his palace. [7] As far as I know, severed heads have no specific sacred significance in Vodou as they once did for, say, the Celts. What they *do* have, though, is a clear power as warnings; when Elizabeth I displayed the heads of traitors on pikes, it was not because she was secretly Baron Samedi. Likewise, Papa Doc himself knew full well the persuasive value of a mutilated human corpse; throughout the 1960s, the 'WELCOME TO HAITI' sign at the national airport was allegedly kept permanently draped with the bodies of murdered rebels at his specific behest. [8]

Papa Doc was definitely not above exploiting the superstitious nature of Haiti's largely illiterate population to secure his rule.

THONY BELIZAIRE / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

LEFT: Haitian people conduct prayers to the black cross, representating Baron Samedi, the god of death in Haitian vodou, at the main cemetery in Port-au-Prince.

THONY BELIZAIRE / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

LEFT: Haitian revellers celebrate carnival on 27 February 2000 dressed as notorious dictators, including Papa Doc Duvalier and Adolf Hitler.

He deliberately encouraged the belief that he had personally raised up zombies to employ in the fierce, deranged militias he had set loose upon the country, calling these thugs the *Tontons Macoutes*, after a 'bogeyman' figure from Haitian legend who liked to kidnap children in a sack and eat them.[9] Even his leading henchmen began to earn a reputation as supernatural entities, gaining nicknames like 'The Vampire of the Caribbean'.[10] Naturally, the outside world took a dim view of such horrors, and in 1962 President Kennedy cut off the aid money which America had been pumping into Haiti in recognition of Duvalier's staunch anti-Communist stance. This was a big blow to Doc, as he had enjoyed stealing most of this cash for himself. When JFK was shot in Dallas on 22 November 1963, Doc was exultant, and put it about that the assassination was the result of a curse that he had placed on the President. After hearing the news, he sent the *Tontons* out to organise street-parties and sat in his palace drinking champagne. JFK's death coming on the 22 November was particularly valuable to Doc, propaganda-wise, as it was well known that 22 was Duvalier's lucky number, supposedly being the day of the month when his protective Vodou spirits were at their most powerful – or, at least, that was what he told his people in order to discourage them from trying to assassinate *him*.[11]

Against all this cynical manipulation of his people, though, are those occasions when Papa Doc apparently indulged his beliefs in private. According to the BBC's Alan Whicker, for instance, who interviewed the dictator in 1968, Duvalier used to take a bath whilst still wearing parts of his Baron Samedi outfit, such as his black top hat.[12] If this is true, then it's hard to see the point of bothering to maintain such a pretence when out of the public eye, unless Papa Doc really *did* think that he was the Baron. He certainly began suffering from insane delusions of grandeur, coming to believe that he was the mystical embodiment of Haiti itself, and the equal of God and Jesus Christ – hence the blasphemous prayer with which we opened. "I am an immaterial being," he once told his followers, hubristically.[13] Perhaps he just got so used to playing the role that he found it hard to step out of it. Most deranged of all, however, was his reaction after Clément Barbot, the traitorous one-time leader of the *Tontons Macoutes*, went on the run after a failed attempt to kidnap Duvalier's children. Unable to find Barbot, Doc consulted a vodou priest, who told him that the fugitive had shape-shifted into a big black dog in order to evade capture. Seemingly believing him, Duvalier promptly ordered that all such dogs in Haiti be shot forthwith.[14]

When Papa Doc finally died in April 1971, chaos was expected in Haiti. It didn't arrive, though, and the transition of power to his son, Jean-Claude 'Baby Doc' Duvalier, was surprisingly smooth. The only deaths were the result of a stampede amongst the crowds lining the streets during Baby Doc's 'coronation' ceremony. Some of those present claimed to have seen Papa Doc's angry ghost in the midst of a small dust-storm that was heading their way, causing panic and fatalities as both ordinary citizens and *Tontons Macoutes* began to flee in all directions, falling into open sewers as they did so – the final victims of the real-life Doctor Death.[15] FT

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

SD TUCKER is an FT regular whose books are *Paranormal Merseyside*, *Terror of the Tokoloshe* and (forthcoming) *The Hidden Folk*. Currently writing a book about forgotten science, his *Great British Eccentrics* is available now from Amberley Publishing.

NOTES

1 Cited at http://holistichistory.wordpress.com/2013/05/31/hh-extra-papa-docs-prayer/.

2 But if this were really true, then why would anyone on the dirt-poor island have bought a radio in the first place? See www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1243016/ANDREW-MALONE-Rape-murder-voodoo-island-damned.html.

3 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franois_Duvalier.

4 You could even speculate that Duvalier might have had some kind of strange near-death experience during his half-day coma. If so, and if these experiences really are culturally determined neurological events, as many argue, then perhaps Duvalier really did believe that he had talked with Baron Samedi after his 'death'.

5 Emmanuel Felix Jr Lawyer, *Understanding Haitian Voodoo*, Xulon Press, 2009, p80.

6 www.express.co.uk/expressyourself/151840/Haiti-Voodoo-Island. A bad guy pretending to be Baron Samedi, of course, does actually appear in a Bond film: 1973's *Live and Let Die*.

7 http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,871400,00.html.

8 www.express.co.uk/expressyourself/151840/Haiti-Voodoo-Island.

9 The *Tontons Macoutes* certainly acted as if they were not human. Armed with guns and machetes and dressed in a uniform of sunglasses, straw hats and blue denim (or sometimes done up as living skeletons), they roamed Haiti raping people, burning them alive, stoning them to death, eating them and cutting out their eyes, hearts and lungs as trophies. Many of their leaders were Vodou priests, giving them an extra air of menace.

10 This 'Vampire' was Luckner Cambronne, Duvalier's second-in-command, and head of the *Tontons Macoutes*. He gained his macabre soubriquet from ordering that blood be drained from Papa Doc's victims (or new ones he picked out on the street) and then sold on to US hospitals, to which he also sold cadavers, through his company Hemocaribien. Supposedly, he even sold human flesh to Haitian hotels, which then ended up serving it to their unsuspecting customers. Corpses lying in their coffins in undertakers' parlours would 'mysteriously' disappear in the night on his orders, presumably strengthening Haitians' belief in zombies. See www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/luckner-cambronne-418865.html.

11 http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/april/22/newsid_2525000/2525501.stm; http://www.commandposts.com/2011/11/november-22-1963/

12 www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/10177663/Alan-Whicker-my-date-with-Papa-Doc-the-daddy-of-all-dictators.html.

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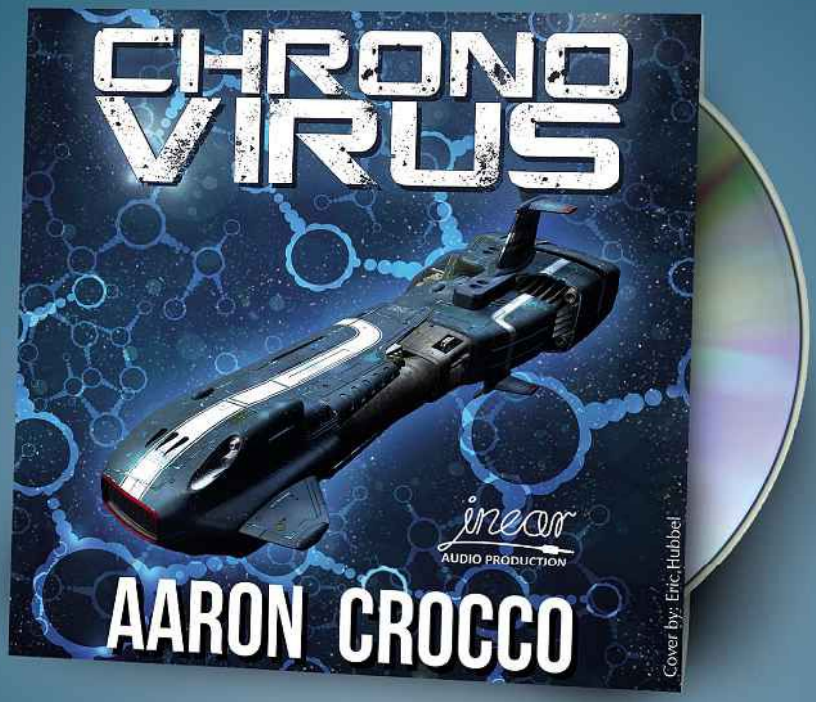

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Strange phenomena in the classroom

GORDON RUTTER explains how he uses his 'day job' to educate the next generation of forteans

GORDON RUTTER is the author of *Paranormal Edinburgh* and *Ghosts Caught on Film 3*. He founded and still runs the Edinburgh Fortean Society.

I'm a frequent contributor to *FT* and the author of several books on related subjects, but my day job is as a biology teacher in a secondary school. Not much scope for fortean activities there, you might think – but you'd be wrong.

There are two main opportunities to make pupils aware of the work of Charles Fort. As well as interdisciplinary learning, or IDL, which offers an opportunity to teach a course based on personal interests while drawing on other subjects (it used to be called cross-curricular studies), I teach a single-day option during Trips Week. That's when all those foreign school trips take place, while the older students are sitting exams and the first years bonding while doing things in woodlands; essentially, there is one whole year group left (the second years) plus a few not taking part in any of the other offerings.

So, what does a typical day consist of for those who choose my 'Investigating the Paranormal' option during trips week? Firstly, I stress that it's about being *interested* in these things – not in blind belief. Someone claims something, and rather than arrogantly stating whether it is or isn't real, we have to look at the evidence. Usually, I start by putting forward the claim that Michael Jackson's ghost was seen on a TV broadcast shortly after his death. Let's investigate, first by watching the clip in question (www.youtube.com/watch?v=6zu9svX2L7A). I'll spoil it for you – its one of those clips where you are invited to pay really close attention and then – right at the end – there's a big shock when MJ suddenly appears and screams! After the pupils have climbed down from the ceiling they hopefully realise they are going to have fun.

The day proper starts with a look at dowsing – a quick video explaining what dowsing is and what powers are claimed for it and then a chance to have a go. I demonstrate dowsing in action using a beaker of water, and sure enough the rods cross. The kids usually think I'm faking it, as at this point the beaker and water are visible. I invite one of them to try and sure enough it usually works for them. That's the cue for me to mention the ideomotor effect – small, involuntary muscular movements making the rods move – which is easily tested. A pupil is sent out and the beaker is placed under one of two upturned wastebaskets. They dowse to find the water, doing this several times to get an average. The best result so far has been 10 people in a row getting it right. Then, we do a similar activity with Zenner cards, and at the end draw a rough graph of the results to show a standard bell curve. These two activities allow me to talk about what we would expect to get by chance and how when the results differ from chance we can start to get excited.

ORDON RUTTER

Another topic we've investigated is Electronic Voice Phenomena, or EVP. I introduce the idea and play the class some EVP samples recorded during the Edinburgh Ghost Festival. We play one a few times and discuss what, if anything, they can make out. I then tell them what some people *think* is being said and play the clip again. And they start to make out the words… which segues nicely into a session on backmasking, where we listen to some music the right way round and then to the same tracks backwards. After hearing one verse of 'Stairway to Heaven' backwards several times, and knowing what's supposed to be hidden there, they are all conversant with Satan's little tool shed. A few more examples illustrate the point and we discuss the fact that with both EVP and backmasking it's a lot easier to hear the message once you have been told what it should be.

Time to get them doing things again – first watching a video on Rupert Sheldrake and his dogs that know when their owners are coming home – something many pupils will say they have experienced. As we don't have any dogs, we need something else to experiment on. Sticking with Sheldrake, I ask how many have experienced the sense of being stared at. We then check this out with one person sitting at the front with their back to the rest of us. I hold up a sheet with "stare" or "don't stare" written on it and record whether they are right or wrong. For each subject we do 10 runs, after deciding that just by chance they would probably get it right about five times (remembering our bell curve from earlier). After the first run, I hand the management of the activity over to the pupils so I can pay attention to see if there are any attempts at cheating (I've never spotted any). The best result we ever had was someone who got it right every single time.

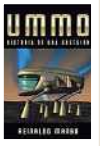
Ghosts are an ever-popular subject, so I have a prepared presentation on ghost photos (a talk I gave at UnCon a few years back), and then we have a go at taking our own ghost photographs. The ghost app on iPads and iPhones is popular, but we also try our hand at low-light photographs with people moving to leave an ethereal blur, and flash photographs with a bit of dust sprinkled in front of the camera to produce some orbs. A bit of experimentation and the pupils are soon expert fake ghost photographers. If they know how to fake one then they should also be able to spot when these tricks are used to try and fool them.

Next, we go for a ghost hunt around the school, asking questions and listening to the EVP and trying for some yes or no responses with the dowsing rods. At the end, I remind them they can take their study further by using books from our well-stocked library and reading *Fortean Times*…

I have the results from all these school experiments – the more data the better! Will there be anything useful in it? Well, as in all forteana, we won't know until we look… FT

Were the Ummites British?

REINALDO MANSO asks whether a famous alien contact hoax that perplexed 1960s Spain might actually have originated here in the UK... and what did Stephen Hawking know about it?



REINALDO MANSO is a longtime student of the Spanish ufological scene and the author of *UMMO: Un Historia de un Obsesion* (Megustaesbriber, 2015), available in paperback and as an ebook from Amazon.

In Spain in the 1960s, during the Franco dictatorship, a purported expeditionary group of extra-terrestrial aliens established unilateral contact with a number of people. The aliens communicated in a way peculiar to themselves: between January 1966 and July 1967, they sent numerous letters through the mail, none with a return address (see **FT149:34-5**). Yet even at its most prolific, the Ummo correspondence did not amount to more than 500 pages in the course of a year and a half – an average of less than a page per day. But included among the letters were a few documents with very interesting insights about physics and biology. Besides the letters, the Ummites left other "proofs" of their presence: two series of very clear photographs showing their vessel flying above Madrid, and even some fragments of nickel of very high purity, and a plastic material (polyvinyl fluoride). At that time, the latter was made exclusively (at least on Earth) by Du Pont de Nemours in the USA, under the brand name TEDLAR. The material had applications only in the aerospace industry.

Since then, and especially after the cloak of secrecy was lifted and the affair was divulged around the world in articles and books, the UMMO documents have sporadically continued to flow – and still flow today (but that's another story; their sources vary, with plenty of jokers joining the show). But back to the origins...

On Monday 4 September 1967 six small saucers 5ft (1.5m) across were discovered in England at equidistant points, between Bristol and London. When they were cut open a message was found inside: "Please return to the Royal rag committee at Farnborough." The culprits of this alleged alien invasion were engineering apprentices at the country's most prestigious aviation research facility, the Royal Aircraft Establishment at Farnborough, Hampshire (see **FT228:32-40** for the full story).

UMMOAELEVE
CENTRE: BERLIN-OUEST
Langue: FRANCAIS
N° de copies: 1
4 JUILLET 1968
AIME MICHEL

Cher monsieur

Nous sommes conscients de la transcendance de ce que nous allons vous dire. Nous comprenons qu'une affirmation de cette nature est habituellement formulée par un dérangé mental, ou par un farceur

Nous observons, avec une probabilité de 99.79 % que vous possédez des connaissances en astronomie des planètes. Cela nous évite des explications qui demanderaient de nombreuses pages dactylographiées.

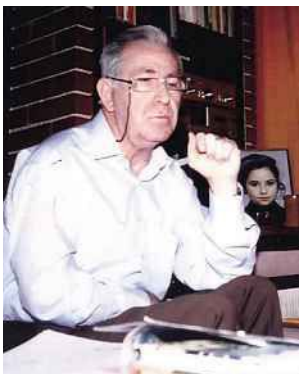
Nous sommes arrivés sur votre planète le 28 mars 1950 de votre calendrier, à 4 h 17 mn 3 s GMT
Nous venons de la planète UMMO, qui se trouve actuellement à 3.68052 années lumières de votre planète, que nous nommons OYÀÀGÀÀ.
Notre planète n'est pas en orbite autour d'une étoile. Elle erre dans l'espace interstellaire. Nous savons qu'elle a été éjectée par réaction gravitationnelle de l'étoile double que vous appelez Wolf 424.
Le diamètre équatorial de notre planète est de 1664.134 KOAE, ce qui correspond à 14503.26 de vos kilomètres.
La température absolue sur UMMO est de 1.239 GLÀGLÀ (un GLÀGLÀ est égal à 2.73 de vos degrés Kelvin)
Nous portons en permanence des ADIPOO, c'est à dire des prothèses dermiques isolantes que vous appelez moufles.
Nous avons donc utilisé un dactylographe pour taper cette lettre

Monsieur, nos salutations les plus calorifiques

Could there be any relationship between these hoaxes and the UMMO affair? Consider what Sir Arthur C Clarke wrote at the time in chapter 31 of *2001: A Space Odyssey*:

They had some good arguments, of course – including the results of a secret Department of Defence study, Project BARSOOM, which had been carried out by Harvard's School of Psychology in 1989. In this experiment in controlled sociology, various sample populations had been assured that the human race had made contact with extraterrestrials. Many of the subjects tested were – with the help of drugs, hypnosis, and visual effects – under the impression that they had actually met creatures from other planets, so their reactions were regarded as authentic. [1]

Dr Juan Dominguez Montes, a Spanish telecommunications engineer and inventor, [2] discovered the UMMO affair in 1970 and soon joined the original group of recipients. He later wrote a book titled *The Pluricosmos* (Lib. Ágora, 1983), in which he sympathetically explored UMMO ideas. In 1993, when Jordán Peña confessed to the hoax, Dominguez ordered his publisher to withdraw all remaining copies of the book so as not to encourage the fraud. But even now, he remains sceptical about Peña's claim: Peña has never provided any evidence for his authorship of the letters or other involvement in the UMMO affair beyond conflicting versions of his confession. To justify himself, Peña said that he had instigated the UMMO letters, photos etc as an experiment, with the help of the CIA, but has never offered anything to confirm such collaboration.



TOP: One of the UMMO letters.

ABOVE: Jordán Peña claimed to have hoaxed the UMMO letters, but never provided any proof of this.

Dominguez is not alone in having doubts. Ignacio Darnaude summarises the objections of both original and current believers in Ummo: "Peña has not explained... how a person behind the scenes like him enjoyed the implausible capacity to invent, for two long decades, the cumbersome... Ummo epistles, an almost superhuman feat demanding, piled onto a single person, the brain of Einstein, the vast encyclopædic culture of Asimov, Aldous Huxley and Jacques Bergier put together... plus the histrionic talent of Sarah Bernhardt and even the cynicism of Machiavelli." Even if this is something of an exaggeration, it gets the point across.

Resisting an extraterrestrial option, Dominguez has an interesting suggestion, as he explained to us during a recent interview: "I am convinced that behind the original UMMO stands a British university, that's for sure. To me, this began with a different purpose that somehow misfired. The documents they sent were inspired by the works of an eminent physicist who wrote

about very original ideas. A students' group directed by a very clever person designed this experiment, maybe to evaluate the people's reaction in a Third World country (as Spain was, under Franco's regime) in a case of alien contact. Later, their Spanish contact and typist Peña took advantage of their efforts and the myth began."

It is true that the UMMO papers exhibit a very British kind of humour, as when they themselves suggested a list of terrestrial alternatives for their origins, citing the CIA, the KGB (of course!), but also the Vatican's Opus Dei and even the British magazine *Punch*! [3] Dominguez said: "The UMMO papers are inspired by Sir Arthur Eddington's works, specifically in his *New Pathways in Science* (Cambridge University Press, 1935). The Ummites even used his words when writing about the soul and the quantum mechanics' interpretation of free will."

The Ummites also introduced (in 68 pages and with a few formulæ) the IBOZOO UU, defined as an elemental (and immaterial) entity composed of orthogonal axes. According to the manner in which these axes are orientated, we see the production of matter, energy, space, and even time. Dominguez asks: "How can all their fundamental ideas coincide with Eddington's? That would be an amazing coincidence, a miracle... We are talking about very original ideas, because only Eddington thought that the Cosmos must be angular, and that is a brilliant idea."

Last but not least, says Dominguez: "The idea that there exist as many cosmoses as there are possible values for the speed of light (from zero to infinity) is also an elaboration after Eddington."

The British scientist was not the only one plagiarised. Ummites used the exact wording employed by Isaac Asimov in his book *The Noble Gases* (1965) in one of their documents. They also drew heavily from Martin Gardner's *The Ambidextrous Universe* (1964). Neither of these books was published in Spain until the Eighties.

"Besides, there is Stephen Hawking. He knows something... I have perceived it in his works," adds Dominguez.

In fact, there *is* a connection between Hawking and UMMO. He was studying astronomy at Cambridge around the time the UMMO papers first appeared in Spain. Years later (around 1990), when French journalist Martine Castello asked him about UMMO, he admitted he had heard about it but refused to make any further comment. [4]

FT's own Peter Brookesmith has made an additional suggestion: the UMMO 'insignia', turned on its side, bears a very strong resemblance to the handwritten form of the letter *ksi* in the Greek alphabet, which we transliterate as 'X'. And X is of course an 'unknown' – a very scholarly touch by the hoaxers!

So, were the Ummites British? Can any readers provide us with a clue?

Or... maybe it was the other way around. In the 1970s, several sceptics pointed to some similarities between UMMO's cosmology and the theories of a Russian scientist, Andrei Sakharov, about a Shadow Universe. Years later, an UMMO letter stated that there was a group of Soviet Russian scientists to whom the Ummites had sent a communication, and that one of those Soviet scientists had written it up and published it under his own name: a nice get-out! In the present case, as Eddington published his work many years before the (alleged) first arrival of the Ummites in 1950 at La Javie, France, the Ummites have a tougher challenge; but they have made an art of contradicting themselves, so perhaps we just have to wait. FT

ETIENNE GILFILLAN

The UMMO papers exhibit a very British kind of humour

ABOVE: A photo supposedly showing an UMMO spaceship over the Madrid suburb of San Jose Valderas in 1967.

ABOVE: *Ummo, another inhabited planet*, 1967, in which Fernando Sesma reproduced the reports and drawings he claimed to be receiving from the aliens.

NOTES

1 Our friend Luis R González mentioned two other connections with science fiction: One of the most amazing features of the Ummite civilisation is their houses, which rise from the ground in the morning and descend at night, thanks to some kind of hydraulic pistons.... exactly the same system used in the pilot episode of *Stingray* (4 October 1964), the famous Supermarionation show filmed in colour, when the headquarters buildings go underground as a precaution against a missile attack.

An episode in the Ummo papers describes a violent revolt in their society against science and technology echoes the similar 'Butlerian Jihad', a key feature of the galactic society described in Frank Herbert's *Dune*, published in 1965. Curiously, according to Herbert, UMMA is a Chakobsa word meaning "one of the brotherhood of prophets" and – much more revealing – is "a term of scorn in the Imperium meaning any 'wild' person given to fanatical prediction". How fitting.

2 www.dominguez-montes.com

3 Another of the Ummite suggestions in the document cited was that the UMMO affair was really the work of "cinema producers raising expectations before the opening of a new film". It holds some water because in 1968 Michael Rennie (from *The Day the World Stood Still*) made one of his last films in Spain. Here it was called *Los monstruos del terror*, but it is believed that the English version was titled *The Man Who Came from Ummo*. Can anybody confirm it was distributed in Great Britain or the United States? Almost a Spanish version of Ed Wood's *Plan 9 from Outer Space*, the plot shows the Ummites restoring to life some classical monsters such as the werewolf and Dracula to help them in their conquest of Earth.

4 Martine Castello, Philippe Chambon, Isabelle Blanc, *La conspiration des étoiles*, Paris, Robert Laffont, 1991, pp18-9.

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This month's books, films and games

reviews

Torment by demons & saints

The tribulations of an illiterate mediæval French woman visited nightly by shape-shifting demons are relevant to students of a wide range of fortean phenomena

The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims

Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski

University of Pennsylvania Press 2015

Hb, 248 pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, $55.00s/£36.00,
ISBN 9780812247152

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £32.40

"Imagine the following scenario: as you are about to go to sleep in your modest dwelling in mediæval Reims, you hear the sound of a little bell. The door opens and two small angels enter, followed by a priest dressed in gold. He declares 'I am Saint Augustine,' and offers to celebrate a mass right there in your bedroom. You can even stay in bed." How would you react, asks Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski (RBK)?

Thus opens chapter 5 of this study of the tribulations endured by Ermine (1347–1396) an illiterate French widow who was "battered and mocked by demons ceaselessly for the last ten months of her life". As Paul Gerhard Schmidt put it, "No other holy woman was frightened to such an extent as poor Ermine". We can identify elements in Ermine's accounts that make her experiences directly relevant to the study of UFO abductees, 'bedroom visitors', poltergeists and so-called 'waking hallucinations'. The fact that so many of her experiences are associated with falling asleep and exhaustion is not lost on us.

Ermine was aged 46 when she came to Reims in 1384 with her husband, Regnault, 17 years older than her. Little is known about her previous life, but her era was full of insecurity and suffering, troubled by wars, plagues and vicious Papal schisms within the Catholic Church, all of which impacted cruelly upon the lives of poor commoners. The couple survived the plague of 1348–9 and as he became feebler, she worked in fields for the pittance that kept them going. Regnault died in 1393, aged 72, and she succumbed to a more virulent outbreak of plague three years later.

Ermine could have slipped through the cracks of history like the countless poor women of the times, especially widows, whose status was tied to their husbands in a generally misogynistic world. But after the loss of her husband, things took a remarkable turn for Ermine. An Augustinian friar known as Jean le Graveur, the subprior of St Paul's church in the northern suburb of Reims, encouraged her to stay in the city and offered her lodgings on the periphery of the scholarly order of Val-des-Ecoliers.

Precisely what his motives were in taking in this "simple little woman of good will" are, RBK acknowledges, difficult to determine. He tutored her in the common rites and penitential disciplines of Catholicism and became her Confessor, but she promised to obey him "as a monk does to an abbot". Two years into this relationship, Ermine had become obsessed with attending Mass (sometimes several times a day) and praying.

Believing herself unworthy of divine mercy, she punished herself with a hair shirt and belt so tight it cut into her; and fasted so severely at times that the priest had to order her to desist.

> **"The worst torments were the visits by demons posing as illustrious saints, martyrs and angels"**

Ermine's religious fervour and disgust at her bodily existence was sublimated into a nightly parade of demonic intrusions into her bedroom. One of her earliest visions, recorded by le Graveur, was of shape-shifting demons, one "blacker than coal, horribly hideous and reaching up to the ceiling, with a huge mouth full of flames just like the opening of an oven, and a tongue, redder than fire, hanging out of his mouth [..] and his eyes throwing out fiery rays that made the woman think these rays would burn out her own eyes…" At times she'd see bears, or bats, monkeys, owls and giant snakes, even "a pig whose skin seemed to be on fire". The animals threaten her and occasionally pee on the floor; sometimes they enter her clothes and climb between her legs. She would wake from a horrible dream to find the elements of it 'real' before her.

The context of Ermine's experiences is clearly set within the spiritual struggle between God and 'the Enemy', as defined by early mediæval theology, and her frequent defence is a small tablet, painted with symbols of Christ's Passion, which she brandishes in front of her at the first whiff of a demon.

The worst spiritual torments were the visits by demons posing as illustrious saints, martyrs and shining angels, always attempting to undermine her faith and resolve. The fake saints were persistent; a demon claiming to be St Mary Magdalene harangued her while she was hanging laundry; another accosted her accusing her loudly of being a whore. A handsome couple had sex in her room, advising her to enjoy the bodily pleasures instead of wasting her time with futile fasting and mortifications. Other demons took the forms of her friends, even her deceased husband, to remonstrate with her. Sometimes they lay in bed behind her so that she heard their breathing.

In visions, she received special tutelage from St Paul the Simple and the Virgin Mary on how to react to the Host during Mass, and such is her yearning for Communion that within the elevated wafer she sees (at different times) Christ being beaten, carrying the cross, being nailed, and as a baby, once leaving her with such rapture that she remained kneeling for five hours.

More puzzling are the poltergeist-like phenomena: bedclothes and other items snatched away to be found later in the street; struggling with an invisible demon that was pulling her protective tablet from her grasp; being turned upside down or pulled up to the ceiling before falling to the floor; and several times vanishing from her room to be stranded on the church roof or in a wood miles from town.

She confessed these strange occurrences, daily, to Jean le Graveur, who recorded them all in vivid detail, resulting in several

Continued on page 62

Gamers' world design

Enjoyable study of video gaming culture covers all the angles – it even brings Little Nell into the discussion of Final Fantasy VII…

Death by Video Game

Tales of Obsession from the Virtual Frontline

Simon Parkin

Serpent's Tail 2015

Pb, 288pp, ind, £12.99, ISBN 9781781254219

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £11.69

Stories of players dropping dead in the midst of video game marathons keep cropping up in the media, and Simon Parkin takes these events as the starting point for *Death By Video Game*. But despite its stark, skull-adorned cover, Parkin's book isn't really about gaming-related deaths.

He argues that the real story here is the way in which video games induce 'timeslip', a form of deep immersion that helps players lose track of time. But what is it about video games that causes timeslip?

This question leads Parkin on a wide-ranging survey and social history of video games. Each chapter covers a different aspect of the appeal of video gaming, including reward mechanics, world design, the freedom of being evil, the thrill of succeeding in front of a crowd, and more. Each section mixes discussions of the general principles with illustrations from various different games, from arcade classics to more recent releases.

Some of Parkin's topics are obvious – the various arguments and personalities of the Gamergate controversy, for instance – while others, such as the role of space exploration games such as Elite in astronomy, are more obscure. Games discussed range from famous titles like the Grand Theft Auto series and Final Fantasy VII to lesser-known independent works like JFK: Reloaded and Al Qaeda crowd-pleaser Night of Bush Capturing (as well as a wide range of worthier titles like That Dragon, Cancer).

Parkin's discussion is interesting – it's not every day you hear someone comparing a certain event in Final Fantasy VII to the death of Little Nell, but the comparison is definitely well-chosen! However, Parkin's discussion is wide-ranging rather than deep. He moves into a new topic, gives some examples, says some insightful things about it, and moves on. The result is a book that looks at the culture and art form of video gaming from a variety of different angles but doesn't go into great depth about any of them.

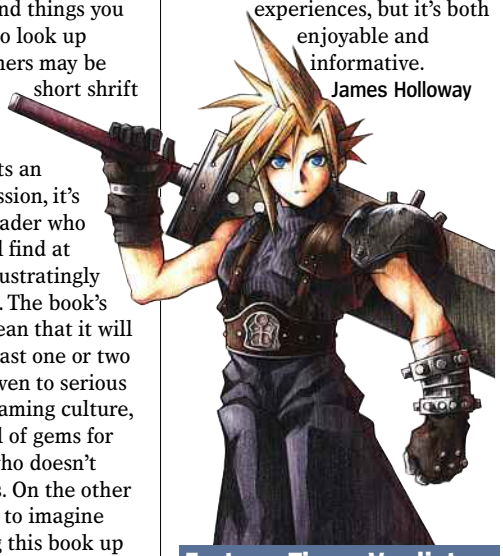
This approach raises the question of who this book is really for. It reads in some ways like an extended magazine article, full of colourful incidents, telling anecdotes and things you feel like you want to look up later. Hardcore gamers may be annoyed by the short shrift given to their favourite subject; since each topic gets an equally brief discussion, it's inevitable that a reader who knows the field will find at least one section frustratingly short or superficial. The book's wide range does mean that it will probably have at least one or two new things to say even to serious students of video gaming culture, and it would be full of gems for the casual gamer who doesn't see what the fuss is. On the other hand, it's very hard to imagine that person picking this book up in the first place. Perhaps the idea is that gamers will buy a copy for non-gaming relatives, assuming that such people even exist any more…

Editing seems to be a consistent problem for books about the weirder side of pop culture, presumably because the titles editors are checking don't necessarily make sense in the first place. This book is no exception; for instance, Assassin's Creed: Blag Flag sounds like it might be a lot of fun, but the actual title is Black Flag. And is the pioneering 1962 game Spacewar! or just Spacewar? Both are used in real life, but picking one in the book would be better.

Ultimately, *Death By Video Game* is an entertaining look at a phenomenon most of us have experienced at one time or another. It's not really about the video-game-related death incidents; that's just the hook. It's definitely not an academic study of how video games produce such engrossing experiences, either. Instead, it's a well-written piece of pop sociology or maybe art history.

Death By Video Game probably won't induce huge revelations about the nature of virtual experiences, but it's both enjoyable and informative.

James Holloway



Fortean Times Verdict

INFORMATIVE AND WIDE-RANGING, BUT WHO EXACTLY IS IT AIMED AT? **6**

Continued from previous page

volumes of a remarkable record of the persistent demonic assault upon Ermine. The priest began to view Ermine as an example of one of the most evocative paragons of female life in the Middle Ages – that of demon-persecuted visionary nuns or holy women (many of whom are discussed by RBK) – and tailored his mentoring accordingly.

Jean le Graveur's aim, writes RBK, "was to show that a simple woman like Ermine could indeed win the battle if her faith was strong enough." He is careful, though, not to portray her a prophet or someone who uses spells, or as a critic of Catholic doctrine, any of which would put her in great danger from Church intellectuals who were already hostile to female theologians and mystics. At least one reformers – Johannes Andreæ – came shockingly close to lumping Ermine's chosen religious affiliation, the Beguines, in with the witches who, as the Canon Episcopi put it, ride out at night with the goddess Diana. Did the priest's 'grooming', asks RBK, "sacrifice Ermine's mental and material well-being to his own goal of producing a saint for the glory of his order?" Probably a bit of both, but it's likely, given the extent of Ermine's exposure to demonic persecution, that the priest saved her from the miserable fate of too many others accused of witchcraft.

Reading the accounts of Ermine's nocturnal encounters (they seem more than 'just' visions), she seems on the brink of insanity, yet during the day she could be rational. This diurnal siege of the mind and spirit is not unknown in psychiatry; recall the famous 19th case of the Frenchman Berbiguier, who was driven out of his house at night by thousands of hobgoblins and would not go home until daylight.

Ermine's torment began in November 1395 and persisted 10 months until her death. As presented to us, filtered through Jean le Graveur's self-serving narrative, it is very clear from Ermine's testimony that she sincerely believed she suffered

at the hands of demons. "Every night she thought she would die," writes the priest. Nor were those who treated the wounds on her battered body in any doubt; but we have to ask how they distinguished the demonic bruises from those raised by her self-mortifications.

Our sceptical nature also notes that there are no unambiguous anomalous events here that have supporting testimony from other witnesses; it all happened to Ermine in the privacy of her room or outside when she was alone or unobserved. This prompts RBK to ask: "Was Ermine a saint in the making, an impostor, an incipient witch, or a madwoman?" To which I add ... or perhaps, in a more archaic society, might she have become a shaman?

Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski – professor of French at the University of Pittsburgh – is to be congratulated on creating this valuable addition to the history of witchcraft and mediæval spirituality, which is all the better for confining its exposition to the relationship between a lay-woman and her confessor, her ascetic and devotional practices, and that topic, hotly-debated in mediæval times, of 'the discernment of spirits'. (RBK devotes a chapter to the epistemology of determining true goodness when even Lucifer can masquerade as an angel of light.)

She has crafted a remarkable record of one woman's oscillation between mysticism and madness, that is much more than an academic study of a mediæval peasant's role in theological, religious, sociological and sexual politics; just as her sympathy for poor Ermine's plight and attention to the details of Ermine's daily life makes this much more than an illustration of the social construction of mental illness. Especially moving is the account of her deathbed visions. After all her suffering, Heaven rolled open and admitted her to a comforting vision of splendour and peace.

Bob Rickard

Fortean Times Verdict

GRIPPING STUDY OF THE DEMONIC POSSESSION OF A HOLY WOMAN **9**

Crystal Cave

The Ultimate Geometry Colouring Book

Ensor Holiday, Roger Burrows, Roger Penrose, John Martineau & Haifa Khawaja

Wooden Books

Pb, 90pp, ill, £9.99, ISBN 9781907155178

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £9.49

Islamic design can be bewildering. Complex geometrical patterns cover every surface of the Alhambra Palace in Granada. They repeat seamlessly, but how? Attempting to copy the designs with pencil, paper and ruler can give an inkling, but it becomes obvious that to gain any real insight would take years.

Crystal Cave gives a deeper understanding and appreciation of geometrical art than anything I have seen before. There are no lists of measures or angles; in fact, there is virtually no text. *Crystal Cave* is a colouring book! Its 85 black on white repeating designs are just as incomprehensible at first glance as anything gracing the Alhambra. The shapes may be filled in to form larger abstract patterns, or even figurative designs. Though I have done little colouring-in over the last half century, I found this surprisingly enjoyable. It produces a state of relaxed concentration that promotes learning; as the hours pass pleasantly, the geometry begins to make sense. This is not a children's book.

Nor are the designs all Islamic: many come from the 'packing geometry' that we see in snowflakes, honeycomb and when we arrange coins by abutting them. Geometrical packing has practical uses in engineering, and relevance to chemistry, physics and other sciences; one of the contributors to *Crystal Cave* is Sir Roger Penrose, the mathematical physicist. The authors all have a relationship to geometry and number that ventures into the mystical.

This colouring books is a corker. When it lands in their Xmas stockings, several friends will have no excuse to be bored on Boxing Day.

Steve Marshall

Fortean Times Verdict

GEOMETRY, MYSTICISM, ISLAMIC ART AND COLOURING **8**

SF and reality

Science fiction is not predictive, but its themes can have real-world counterparts

Ten Billion Tomorrows

How Science Fiction Technology Became Reality and Shapes the Future

Brian Clegg

St Martin's Press 2015

Hb, 320 pp, notes, ind, £18.99, ISBN 9781250057853

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £17.09

Charles Fort coined a word – teleportation – that is now in the mainstream science lexicon. In the form of quantum teleportation, it's a phenomenon that can be demonstrated on a tiny scale in laboratory experiments. For most people, however, it conjures up images of science fiction gadgets like the transporter in *Star Trek*. The scientific reality falls far short of this – not just now, but probably for centuries to come. That's the recurring motif of this fast-moving and highly readable book. In chapter after chapter, Brian Clegg whizzes through the common tropes of science fiction, from robots and cyborgs to artificial intelligence and *Matrix*-style virtual reality, from clones and holograms to spaceships, ray guns and cloaking devices. In all cases, the bottom line is pretty much the same: science can do that, but it can't do it very well.

As Clegg points out in the introduction, science fiction rarely sets out to make realistic predictions about the future. If it deals with some fancy new piece of technology, that's because it makes a good story. At its best, SF deals in "what if?" scenarios: if this technology existed, what impact would it have on people and the world? In the worst kind of SF, futuristic technologies may be nothing more than stage props in a stereotyped action drama. So it's surprising to discover how many science fiction themes have genuine real-world counterparts – and how much real science Clegg is able to communicate simply by using sci-fi tropes as a springboard.

The problem with a book of this type is that its potential scope is so vast that the coverage is necessarily selective. The flip side is that no matter how familiar a reader is with some of the material, they're going to learn plenty of new things from it. For example, I was fascinated to read about Roboroach – an electronic kit you can attach to a living cockroach in order to control its movements with a smartphone – and the Adaptiv system, which turns a 60-tonne tank into a small family car when it's viewed through night vision goggles. Sounds like science fiction? Nope – both those products are on the market today!

Andrew May

Fortean Times Verdict

HIGHLY READABLE ACCOUNT OF THE SCIENCE BEHIND SF **9**

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Muso shrimps

Do animals enjoy music as we do – and have you been deafened by scorpions?

Animal Music

Sound and Song in the Natural World

Tobias Fischer & Lara Cory

Strange Attractor 2015

Pb, 179pp, illus, CD, £15.99, ISBN 9781907222344

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £14.39

Music seems to be a fundamental human attribute. It is present in some form in all cultures and goes back into prehistory as far as we can trace humanity, but are we the only musical species?

The animal world is full of musical sounds; are these simply means of communication that coincidentally sound musical to our ears, or do animals make and enjoy music in a similar way to humans? A growing number of researchers think so, and *Animal Music* takes a snapshot of the current state of their work.

I find books about sound difficult; it is hard to convey sound's nature clearly in words, and the result is frequently bone-dry and abstrusely technical, missing totally the visceral excitement of listening.

Fischer and Cory have avoided this by presenting the research through a series of essays, interviews and thought pieces, accompanied by an illustrative CD. The result is more anecdotal than systematic, and does not attempt to be the definitive summation of current knowledge, providing instead a snapshot of current ideas and approaches. It also surveys a pleasingly eclectic spread of investigators, scientists, musicians, sound recordists – and gives equal weight to the insights of all of them.

The book seethes with a restless, questing intelligence as the authors probe different approaches to the subject, exemplified by the section headings, e.g. 'How Do Animals Produce Sound and How Do They Sing?' , 'How Do Animals Hear and How Should We Listen to Them?'. No animal sound is too small or commonplace for their attention, be they shrimp louder than a Grateful Dead concert, or a cat's purr, which gets two essays to itself. These confirm my suspicion that many cat vocalisations are designed to manipulate humans, and more than that, purring has healing powers too, at least for the cat.

A drawback of the format is that as soon as one piece has whetted your appetite, it has ended and the authors are on to the next. However, the essays are rich in anecdotes, and there are excellent references should you wish to follow up any of the topics. A stand-out, though, is the interview with Chris Watson, former Cabaret Voltaire member and now a sound recordist who has worked with David Attenborough. He carefully differentiates between noise and sound, explains how he listens and rhapsodises about the sound of Tyneside scrapyards.

What really makes this book excel, though, is the CD that comes with it. Compiled by the respected German natural history label Gruenrekorder, it pulls together sounds from wood ants, scops owls, pilot whales, pink dolphins and many more, including – rather wonderfully – the sound of a tiny water scorpion that sounds like something produced by a particularly austere minimalist power electronics band.

Wonderful.

Ian Simmons

Fortean Times Verdict

GROOVE ON DOWN WITH WATER SCORPIONS AND SCOPS OWLS **9**

Chameleo

A Strange but True Story of Invisible Spies, Heroin Addiction, and Homeland Security

Robert Guffey

OR Books 2015

Pb, 268 pp, notes, photos, ISBN 9781939293695

AVAILABLE FROM OR BOOKS OR AMAZON

This is a page-turner, a fortean feast featuring mind-control, a government cover-up, shadow people, and – best of all – invisible midgets. It's nearly impossible to put down – until, suddenly, it is.

This is a shame because the author is obviously talented. Guffey makes his case slowly and carefully, piling up facts. We're drawn along on a drug-addled journey where invisible midget US government agents seem not only possible but inevitable. (They prefer to be called "little people". Guffey's usage is followed here.)

Such believability is a triumph, since the real-life story began so unpromisingly. In 2003 the author heard from an old friend, Dion Fuller, who then lived in southern California. Fuller partook rather generously of alcohol, methamphetamines and heroin, making him a fairly unreliable witness. He also dealt drugs from his apartment, which gradually became a hangout for "fuck-ups and scumbags", as Guffey puts it.

One guest, according to Fuller, claimed to be a Marine, absent without leave from nearby Camp Pendelton, from which he'd stolen a truck, 25 sets of night-vision goggles and a Department of Defense laptop containing files marked 'SECRET' and 'ABOVE TOP SECRET'.

What happened after that makes Alice's trip through the looking glass sound like a documentary. The Marine and his loot disappeared, and Fuller was harassed by government agents, visible and invisible, who demanded the goggles' return. (Oddly, they seemed much less worried about the computer.)

As Guffey's spy research shows, the most novel form of harassment brought to bear, after wanton see-through intruders, is 'Street Theater', a form of stalking in which the subject's routine is purposefully interrupted by bizarre events, so that he or she will not only feel increasingly isolated, but will appear to be mentally ill when recounting these activities. (Timothy Good has put forward a similar theory about the ludicrous stories sometimes related by UFO occupants during close encounters.)

After a cross-country escape, Fuller joined Guffey in interviewing Richard Schowengerdt, who claimed to be a scientist at military contractor Northrop Grumman, where he worked on Project Chameleo, the invisibility technology used in part to bedevil Fuller. (Note to fairies and leprechauns: people of small stature are chosen as agents, apparently, because they have less surface area to disguise.)

The interview with Schowengerdt, starting on page 183, is where the book goes off the rails. This is not because Schowengerdt calls in the authority of Col Philip Corso, he of alien back-engineering fame, and also Roswell and Bob Lazar, the (maybe) whistle-blower who revealed that Area 51 is a flying saucer garage. Guffey relates the interview in question-and-answer format.

This is laudable from an archival standpoint, but in journalism it's called "dumping your notebook." A little judicious editing on the author's part would have spared readers comments such as: "Right." "Quite a few, right." "Right. I would think so."

Worse, as soon as we're done with this rare opportunity to meet a Top Secret spy scientist – who's also a Freemason! – Guffey turns to fiction. "What happened from this point on would be another book in itself," he writes. "In fact, it is. It's called *The Opposite of Foolproof* and though it's ostensibly a novel, it pretty much accurately depicts all the chaos that occurred during the next four weeks."

We and the invisible little people can wait.

Jay Rath

Fortean Times Verdict

ITS GREATNESS DISSIPATES TWO-THIRDS OF THE WAY THROUGH **7**

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Star Wars: The Force Awakens

Dir JJ Abrams, US 2015

On general release

Long-awaited, hugely-hyped and very expensive, *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* will no doubt break all box office records and shift untold mountains of merchandise – but is it any good?

Let's deal with the positives first. It looks great. Eschewing the overblown CGI of the last three films in favour of a balance of practical and digital effects was a wise decision, and yields impressive results. The early sequences on the endless dunes of desert planet Jakku, littered with the detritus of crashed Star Destroyers and knackered AT-ATs, look magnificent and recapture the epic feel of the original. In terms of visuals, at least, *SWTFA* can't be faulted. British actors Daisy Ridley and John Boyega, as new characters Rey and Finn, are immediately appealing and full of promise for future outings; and of course it was always going to be fun to see Harrison Ford back in harness as a more, er, mature Han Solo. BB-8, the cute new droid, is... well, very cute indeed – probably even cuter than R2-D2. And there's no Jar Jar Binks to be seen. Or Ewan McGregor, for that matter. These are *all good things*; actually, these are also *all of the good things*.

Diehard fans of the franchise, and easily led norms, will probably convince themselves that *SWTFA* is some sort of pop-cultural second coming, but the truth is that what director and co-writer JJ Abrams has achieved here is, in the end, unremarkable except for its stunning lack of ambition: it's a comfort blanket of a film, a lacklustre and bone-headedly unimaginative remix of the franchise's greatest hits, which takes familiar elements from the first three movies and shuffles them about a bit. It's a box-ticking exercise, rather as if the scriptwriting chores had been entrusted to some sort of *Star Wars* plot-generating machine; you feed in your favourite *SW* moments and it recombines them at random before spewing out the handsome finished product. Loveable little droid entrusted with invaluable data must reach beleaguered rebels: check. Heroes visit cantina full of oddball, music-playing aliens: check. X-Wing fighters fly impossible trench-runs on the Death Star: check. *Millennium Falcon* pulls off impossible escape from pursuers: check. Wrinkly muppet dispenses wisdom to young greenhorn: check. Daddy issues lead to inevitable confrontation in place where chances of falling from great height and dying are all too real: check. And so on, although not necessarily in the above order, and all slathered in those lovely, oh-so-familiar John Williams musical cues that will ensure that your inner child – though probably not your actual child, who will be waiting for the next boring space battle – wells up at the appropriate moments.

Joseph Campbell famously saw *Star Wars* as re-animating timeless myth for modern audiences, and myth, of course, is well known for simply shuffling and reshuffling its somewhat limited deck of *topoi* over and again; *SWTFA*, though, is a movie, not a myth. Or, if it is a myth, it's a self-conscious, indeed self-serving, one concerned with origins not journeys. Yes, it takes us back to the hero's quest of the first film, gender-swapping that central figure and telling a story that could be retitled 'The Search for Luke Skywalker's Magic Phallus'; but the only journey it's *really* interested in is one back to where everything started: 1977, childhood innocence, the Big Bang that gave birth to the modern blockbuster.

SWTFA is a single-minded, and simple-minded, exercise in nostalgia. When we first re-encounter Han Solo, he turns to his Wookie companion and says: "We're home, Chewie". And that's how Abrams wants us to feel too, all the intervening years and films wiped magically away. George Lucas tried to become a grown-up, and was nearly lynched for it, replacing myth with (pseudo) history in his reviled prequel trilogy; but Abrams isn't interested in history (although one suspects he's seen some documentaries about the Nazis). There's a whole meta-narrative at work here; this is a film about itself.

The film's young protagonists, Rey – a resourceful desert scavenger – and Finn – a Stormtrooper who's deserted from the First Order – think of Luke, and Han as figures of legend, not history, even though we're supposedly only 30 years on from the events of *Return of the Jedi*. (Don't these people read books or watch telly?) Their world – and ours – needs re-enchanting; they must learn that the Jedi, with their cool lightsabers, really existed. *SWTFA's* purpose is to convince us that the beliefs we held when we were very young were true: that the Universe is made up of black and white and goodies and baddies, that cinema began in 1977, that *Star Wars* was the best film ever, and that, thanks to JJ's awesome talents, you *can* go home again.

For all its visual grandiosity, *SWTFA* has stunningly little to say and there's very little, in turn, that one can really say about it. Abrams acknowledges no reality beyond that of the franchise itself – not even that of other movies, the very stuff that Lucas repurposed into his original epic. He creates an hermetic film about an hermetic world. Its three acts reiterate the settings of the first three instalments, taking us to a desert planet (*A New Hope*), a lush, forested one (*Return of the Jedi*) and an ice world (*The Empire Strikes Back*); the only hint of a complex civilisation (yes, the one that made the prequel trilogy such a bore) is when poundshop Darth Vader lookie-likie Kylo Ren's Nu Death Star takes out a whole Republican planet. (JJ hates complexity, but he likes casually destroying planets in the manner of a naughty, omnipotent, *enfant terrible*: witness the fate of Vulcan in his execrable *Star Trek* reboot).

The film is light on exposition: none of the plodding jaw-jaw of Lucas's efforts, but plenty of war-war. Possibly as a result, the film's story – if such a stringing together of inconsequential and unconnected events can be called a story – makes little sense. Gaping plot holes, credulity-stretching coincidences and poorly disguised MacGuffins loom large; the script even arrogantly draws our attention to one of them, as if to suggest that we really should just lighten up, disengage the old grey matter and enjoy – because *this is fun, dammit*.

Well, perhaps it is; but when Abrams can't even manage to make the most obvious emotional beats of the piece work, then it's not even much of that. His *Trek* reboots had already suggested that he is simply not capable of originality, but it's nonetheless astonishing just how little here is new: no risks are taken, there are no surprises and no suspense. Perhaps that's ultimately the point: this is a mere simulacrum of a better film, and it only wants to reassure us that we can return to a pristine state of being entertained over and over again, forever.

David Sutton

Fortean Times Verdict

SELF-SATISFIED REHASH OF STAR WARS'S GREATEST HITS **6**

THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot! (www.theflicksthatchurchforgot.com; @revpeterlaws)

BLOOD RAGE

Dir John Grissmer, US 1983 (1987)
Arrow Video, £15.99 (Dual format)

Blood Rage is a bizarre slasher movie on steroids, and it's an absolute blast. Don't kick yourself if you've never heard of it. The film had such a messy release slate that it's not on too many people's radars. Made in 1983, it came too late to catch the then-dying slasher craze; so it sat on a shelf until 1987, when it was finally given a limited release under the *Nightmare on Elm Street* cash-in title *Nightmare at Shadow Woods*. It's also known as *Slasher*. Confused? Don't be. The folks at Arrow Video have sifted through the vaults and thrown all known versions together in a delightfully wacky three-disc Blu-Ray set.

On paper, *Blood Rage* sounds like a hundred other films that aped John Carpenter's seminal *Halloween*. Opening scene: a young psycho-boy commits murder. After a lingering shot of his gaunt, post-kill stare, we cut to 10 years later. Now the adult killer's escaped from his institution! He's back on home ground, killing everyone in sight! It's not Hallowe'en – but it is Thanksgiving! Which gives the film it's most quotable line. "It's not cranberry sauce!" the killer says at the sight of splattered blood. So, yes, the film's set up is as generic as they come. Which makes it all the more impressive when *Blood Rage* elevates itself, through a refreshing, if quite, mad sensibility.

Everything is in fifth gear. Even the gore. Future Oscar nominee Ed French delivers on the hokey, but still hardcore, effects. We get chopped chops; severed legs; and skulls cracked open (with glistening brains beneath). French is on a steady quest to outdo himself with each successive death. The killer isn't a masked enigma, either: he's a jolly, thigh slapping youth; a nerdy, semi-cool, in-betweener with a rampant lust for violence rather than sex. He carves people up in his retro, armless T-shirt and laughs while doing so. All this unfolds to an up-tempo synth soundtrack that would have been perfect for an Eighties workout video. The sheer energy of all this is hard to resist.

Yet it's Louise Lasser, as the mad killer's mother, who forces *Blood Rage* into the horror fan's memory banks. Lasser was the film's big(ish) name, most famous for playing the lead in the clever soap opera parody, *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman*. Here, she's a mum permanently on the edge of a nervous breakdown. Her performance brings an unsettling, surreal edge to the pulpy action. This is an exploitation movie – course it is – yet Lasser plays her demented part as a straight, dramatic role. She's quirky, funny and, at times, (particularly in the bleak and creepy ending) rather disturbing.

Blood Rage won't suit everyone; in fact, its formulaic concept and frantic execution might even infuriate more than a few. But there's a creative mania here that's rarely seen in 'rip-off' movies. So while we're on the subject of thanksgiving, let's clink our glasses to the cult labels which keep giving forgotten films like this such a wild and twisted new lease of life. Cheers! Now pass me that leftover cranberry sauce...

Fortean Times Verdict

A COMPLETELY INSANE, GORE-SPLATTERED ONE-OFF **7**

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EASTERN PROMISE

SLOVAKIAN SOUNDS THAT FUSE THE ANCIENT WITH THE MODERN ARE BEING BROUGHT TO THE FORE BY CZECH MUSIC DIRECT

At this remove, talking with Czechs and Slovaks you will inevitably hear comments that it was tragic when Czechoslovakia broke apart to become the Czech Republic and Slovakia on January 1, 1993, following the Velvet Revolution of November/December 1989, which saw off decades of Communist government.

Economics and politics aside, the Czechs did well with this arrangement. They got most of the culture, leaving the Slovaks to virtually start again. Here is the reason that makes Slovakian music, in all its forms, so interesting. For Laurence Lewis, of Czech Music Direct, Slovakian music has taken him on "a roller coaster musical learning curve".

In the decade that Laurence, and in the formative years his late wife Helen, have run Czech Music Direct, they have sold music from eastern Europe over the internet through specialist dealers. They have created a catalogue of labels offering musical history – from the earliest of music to cutting-edge contemporary sounds.

"There were the old state labels," says Laurence, "now small indie labels are flourishing in Slovakia. The most important of these is Hevhetia, which is based in Košice, the second city of Slovakia. During 2013 Košice was a European Capital of Culture and will soon be a European City of Sport."

Hevhetia now hosts more than 100 titles, including Bach and Beethoven by Miki Skuta, Slovakia's leading classical pianist, as well as encouraging many genres of new music and musicians.

A recent Hevhetia release features singer Hanka Gregušová (left), who loves Afro-American music. She also found jazz in America, where she worked as a singing waitress. These elements fuse through her album *Essence*, in which antique Slovakian folk music themes are reimagined for the 21st century with jazz and rock beats. It's quite a production, with a backing line-up of leading Slovakian jazz musicians and, on some tracks, a cimbalom band. Not exactly jazz or traditional folk, it's these surprising elements that make *Essence* such a good listen.

There is also that surprise element in AMC Trio (pictured above), featuring pianist Peter Adamkovič, bassist Martin Marinčák and drummer Stanislav Cvanciger. They appear to be a classic jazz trio but that's not what they play. Long ago they decided not to be an eastern European clone of a typical jazz trio playing the Great American Songbook. They play only their own compositions, which they write as a collective.

Over their several Hevhetia albums, AMC Trio follow a musical path that has brought them to a kind of jazz storytelling. Each number becomes a self-contained story, rather than a theme stated with various solos around it. AMC's Hevhetia album *Waiting for a Wolf* invites listeners to spend a night under the stars waiting for a wolf to appear. It also has the heartbreaking number She's Leaving for Heaven, dedicated to all those who have lost someone who is close to them.

This and other tracks from *Waiting for a Wolf* featured in AMC's gig during the London Olympics, where they were part of the official Slovakian cultural programme. They have also played gigs at the Polish Jazz Café in Hammersmith and Band on the Wall in Manchester.

We still await the Pressburger Klezmer Band to visit the UK. They are the longest-running klezmer band in Slovakia, taking their name from the original name of Slovakia's capital, which is now called Bratislava. Jewish culture was obliterated during the German occupation of Czechoslovakia, and wasn't encouraged by the communists. It is only in recent years that Jewish culture is gradually reviving in both the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

Music plays an important role here, partly through the Pressburger Klezmer Band, as they bring back ancient melodies that the original klezmer musicians carried from village to village.

Today, you're more likely to find the Pressburger Klezmer Band performing in concert halls than on village greens. It may still be fronted by that familiar klezmer clarinet sound but now there are many additional instruments, to which they have added jazz, rock and reggae beats.

Mit Libe, the Pressburger Klezmer Band's Hevhetia album (inset), features classics such as Donna Donna, Oy, Abram and the moving Nign far Simon, an original klezmer song dedicated to the memory of Simon Wiesenthal (1908-2005). Like the others mentioned, its music is, as Laurence Lewis says "there to be listened to and discovered".

The CDs mentioned can be found at Czech Music Direct, visit czecheverything.co.uk. They can also be downloaded from your favourite online music store.

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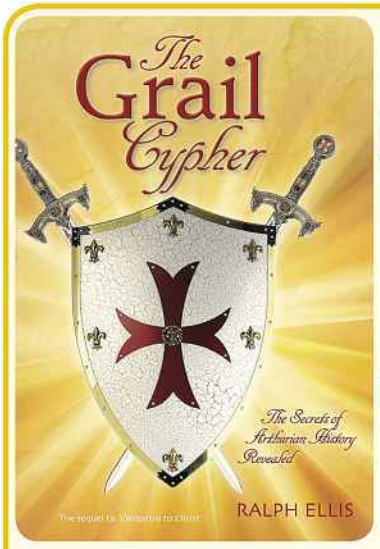

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Dear FT...

letters

Saint Death

The slang drug name flakka for the synthetic drug Alpha-PVP [**FT331:11**] is very appropriate as it comes from *la flaca* (slender beauty). This is also an affectionate nickname for Death, who is female in Hispanic American popular religion. La Flaquita (the skinny girl), also known as Santa Muerte (Saint Death), is a beloved folk saint. She is patroness of drug users, among others. "I pray to her so I won't overdose," explained a devotee in a film documentary.

Santa Muerte has European roots in the Dance of Death, especially La Parca, her Spanish ancestress; but Mexicans feel she owes more to the skeletal Aztec death goddess, Mictecacíhuatl. Santa Muerte often carries the European Grim Reaper's scythe, but has a gorgeous feminine wardrobe, from nuns' habits to wedding dresses. In my local supermarket, among votive candles to Our Lady of Guadalupe, I found one to La Flaquita under the more orthodox alias of "Most Holy Death, Servant of God". Neither version is approved by the Church, but it's not rare to find Our Lady of Guadalupe as a skeleton. (See R Andrew Chesnut's *Devoted to Death*, OUP 2012).

Leslie Vinson
Tucson, Arizona

Hair scam

Fortean Times has, from time to time, covered hair-clipping panics [see, for instance, Steve Moore's "Hair today..." **FT177:42-46**]. While researching something completely different, I came across an early German example. According to the *Bayerischer Landbote*, 14 July 1869: "Recently, some girls of the Maxvorstadt suburb [of Munich, Bavaria] pursued the swindle we already had a good 10 years ago, of selling their hair and then lying about it and claiming it had been clipped from them by force. Fortunately, the manœuvre was immediately exposed." I assume the hair was sold to some person producing felt or cushions – or is it an early example of what the media tells us about Japanese schoolgirls – that they sell stuff to fetish customers?

Ulrich Magin
Hennef, Germany

Simulacra corner

Finlay Harris spotted this face in the forest floor while walking in "the hermitage" woodland area in Perth, Scotland, just outside Dunkeld.
We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them to the PO box above (with a stamped addressed envelope or international reply coupon) or to sieveking@forteantimes.com – and please tell us your postal address.

Ladybird clusters

I am curious about the behaviour of some ladybirds. We had a lot in evidence during the recent warm spell and as it cooled quite a number appeared in the house (something I have never known happen before) where they are now clustered in the angle where the wall and ceiling meet. They seem to be settled there. Why? Is this normal?

Pam Thornton
By email

Rubber scare

Re Jack Romano's letter about the horror stories involving Viton, a synthetic rubber used in some seals and gaskets [**FT 333:69**]: there is a well-known health and safety urban legend that usually involves the alleged results of exposure to Viton that has been heated in a fire, for instance in a burnt-out car. It is debunked on the Health and Safety Executives (HSE) website www.hse.gov.uk/mvr/topics/fluoroelastomer.htm. Interestingly, the tale may stem from a real incident in 1981 when Viton was exposed at 400˚C and some 600psi in a test-rig. When a worker opened the equipment, a liquid was ejected under pressure near his hand and he developed a deep-seated corrosive/chemical burn that resulted in part of a finger being amputated. HSE's investigation showed that hydrogen fluoride gas produced in the experiment had dissolved in water to give hydrofluoric acid, which had caused the burn. The conditions and sequence of events that led to this accident would be very difficult to replicate in a real fire situation, so it comes as no surprise that there has been no verifiable incident related to HF from burnt-out vehicles anywhere in the world.

Ron Gardner
Ludlow, Shropshire

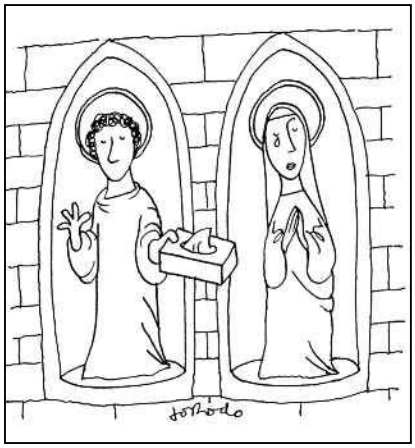
Time travel meme

Re the recent sidelines story about the person advertising for a time travelling companion [**FT333:8**], this is almost identical to the movie *Safety Not Guaranteed*, itself based on an earlier newspaper advertisement. It seems to be becoming a recurrent motif.

Duncan Steed
Cardiff

Green ink...

We in the Metropolitan police mourn the loss of green ink. Overtime was written into the day's duties to show how much notice had been given to an officer – the less notice, the greater amount



JORODO

letters

of overtime paid. Black ink (boo!) was time and a third, red ink time and a half, and gloriously green ink meant less than eight days' notice and double time! The green ink days are now sadly over, and black ink is the order of the day. How we miss that beautiful verdant wonder.

Simon Crowley
Kemsing, Kent

I Am Spartacus!

Paul Screeton provided some interesting speculation on the famous film declaration "I am Spartacus!" [**FT332:58-59, 335:17**], although it had never occurred to me that the answer for the scene's origin would be found in folklore. I always simply assumed the scene was Dalton Trumbo's approximation of the finale of the Clifford Odets play *Waiting for Lefty*, in which underpaid taxi drivers are moved to rally in solidarity with their slain leader via the simple cry of "Strike!" Odets was hugely influential in his day, casting a long shadow over the whole leftist social realist tradition of which Trumbo was a product. Certainly, the nobility of the oppressed underclass seems much more a Trumbo preoccupation than one of Kubrick's.

Though his plays might be regarded as overly idealistic and heavy-handed today, Odets had a knack for agitprop slogans. Barack Obama's campaign motto "Yes, We Can," so often described as a translation of the Cesar Chavez line "Si, se puede", is noticeably close to the defiant proclamation "Yes, You Can!" from the Odets play *Golden Boy*.

Where the mass crucifixion came from I couldn't say, though the atrocities of the Soviet Union must have weighed heavily on the conscience of a Hollywood Stalinist like Trumbo. The movies have a way of giving the mass slaughters of war an uplifting quality they do not often possess in real life. Movies like *Spartacus* and *Saving Private Ryan* preach the message that it's glorious for the many to die in service of the protection of a single beloved figure. It would be nice to think of history as rife with such tales of self-sacrifice. However, the Bible presents us with a much less flattering account of human nature, since the disciples of Jesus deserted their leader on the eve of his crucifixion. My own sporadic experience as a union steward has indicated a tendency among people to drop their complaints and principles when their jobs are at stake, let alone their lives.

Brett Taylor
Wartburg, Tennessee

Festive fruit

I picked this striped apple while working on the apple farm at Chair in Co Tipperary. It was so tasty.

Paul Hanlon
Clonmel, Co Tipperary

Witness reliability

While I respect your unnamed correspondent's clearly well qualified contribution [**FT334:74**] to the debate on the reliability of pilots as observers, I don't think that, in my original letter [**FT331:69**], I implied that they were infallible. I was merely taking issue with the sceptics' stance that I felt went too far the other way – possibly because some of the more difficult-to-debunk UFO reports have come from pilots. Your correspondent's views notwithstanding, I would still argue that simple logic suggests that a front line fighter pilot with 20-20 vision and untold hours of training to enable him (or her) to cope with stressful situations has to be, at the very least, a slightly more reliable witness than a civilian with average-to-poor eyesight and no stress training whatsoever. Furthermore, a number of UFO incidents have been observed by more than one pilot, thus reducing the possibility of poor observational skills (although, I suppose, increasing – from the point of view of a sceptic – the possibility of collusion). I am reminded of the arguments that arose in the wake of the 1976 Tehran UFO incident when Philip Klass's non-ET explanation relied heavily on painting the Iranian air force pilots as virtual morons or liars. The pilots believed they had encountered a highly advanced, structured craft, whereas Klass thought that they had seen the planet Jupiter.

Geoff Clifton
Solihull, West Midlands

Investing in cryptids

'Elusive' is the best word to describe cryptids. From hairy bipeds such as 'Bigfoot' and the 'Florida Skunk Ape' to lake monsters like 'Ogopogo' and 'Champ' – these creatures have been seen and photographed yet no one has been able to obtain a type specimen. Of all the cryptids my bet is the first to be captured and officially recognised will be 'Ogopogo' of the lakes of Canada, believed to be a 'zeuglodon' or prehistoric whale.

With all of the bad publicity SeaWorld has suffered from animal rights' activists, it would do well for them to launch an investigative expedition to Lake Okanagan to capture one. SeaWorld could be a great asset to cryptozoologists inasmuch as previous investigations into lake monsters have been limited due to lack of money. Recent sonar studies on Lake Champlain have revealed 'chirping' and 'clicking' sounds similar to cetaceans but that has been the extent of the research. A good underwater study of the floors of these lakes might reveal caves and passageways that could link them to the sea or who knows where else?

At a reunion of SeaWorld animal care employees a few years ago, I asked the curator if he had ever heard of a zeuglodon and he was clueless. An attempt by cryptozoologists such as Dr Karl Shuker and Loren Coleman to interest corporations such as SeaWorld and other zoological institutions to offer their financial and technical expertise would be a most worthwhile effort and could bring us closer to unlocking the mysteries of these elusive creatures that have been 'hidden' for so many years.

Greg May
Orlando, Florida

Tinfoil hats

While some of Noel Rooney's observations about people who wear 'tin hats' to protect themselves from alien influences are well made [**FT334:5**], I would like to offer another perspective. When I was growing up in 1950s England, our next-door neighbour, Mrs Voice (an appropriate name under the circumstances) took to covering her head in aluminium foil whenever she left her house. Of course, no one said anything, and she was often accompanied by other women as she went shopping. As was the fashion at the time, all the women wore conventional hats, though Mrs Voice looked as if she had an oven-ready chicken balanced on her shoulders. At some point, lacking adult tact, I must have raised this matter with her, for she explained to me that she did this because of the recent Russian Sputniks. Apparently these rockets were making holes in the sky and letting in harmful rays, hence the millinery prophylactic. However, the emissions of rockets and aircraft do 'make holes in the sky' – lesions in the ozone layer – that do lead to problems, albeit more likely to result in cancer and cataracts. So Mrs Voice was both right and wrong.

As a psychotherapist I would suggest that she had reified an inchoate awareness, and turned it into a causal fact. This is not uncommon. Think of those experiencing OCD who might feel the need to wash their hands again and again. Innumerable cultures emphasise the connection between bodily cleanliness and spiritual purity. Again, a profound idea has been turned into a mechanical ritual that misses its situation within a wider cultural understanding. After all, the opposite, as far as know, is unknown: a compulsion to dirty one's hands a dozen times a day. There is no cultural mythology in which such an act might be embedded.

One could also consider another common example of reification.

Those designated as delusional who believe that magic rays from the television dictate their thoughts. I trust, gentle reader, that none of your thoughts has ever been influenced by what you have seen on the news… While the majority have the ability to doubt or question what they see, some experience the idea 'the television controls me' literally. Metaphor is magicked into a fact. The psychiatrist RD Laing gave an example of a young man who became convinced that his father had been replaced by an identical double, for which he was awarded the diagnosis of schizophrenia. During an interview with the man's mother, she admitted that her husband was not the father of her son. In other words, the legal father was in some important way an imposter. When she told her son the truth, his symptoms vanished. In all sorts of ways those who may be oversensitive to life events, or have a very fragile sense of themselves, may grasp at something that appears to give a clear and solid explanation for their predicament and get, so to speak, the wrong end of the stick. But the stick may be real when grasped differently.

One could also think of current cosmology. Once there was the idea that an invisible and undetectable 'ether' encompassed everything. While this theory is (almost) discredited, there is nevertheless a belief in the existence of 'dark matter'. This substance cannot be seen or measured, but its presence is a conjectured explanation for perceived anomalies. However, if I were to believe that an invisible and undetectable substance might explain my behaviour, then it might be better if I kept quiet about it.

Mike Harding
London

Vaccination wars

David Hambling's excellent summary of "the war between vaxxers and anti-vaxxers" [**FT334:14**] reminded me of a related story that I was told when I worked for Leicestershire Area Health Authority in the 1970s. As the Area Statistician I worked closely with medical colleagues in Community Medicine/ Public Health to monitor disease notifications and vaccination uptake. The Specialist responsible for children's services was an experienced female doctor (probably in her late 50s) who was born and raised in Germany. I recall that she came to the UK prior to WWII. We were chatting about vaccinations when she told me of a disaster relating to BCG [tuberculosis] vaccinations in Germany. I have googled the following description of events:

The Lübeck disaster (1930): In 1930 the tragic disaster in Lübeck shattered confidence in BCG. In this Northern German city, a scheme to vaccinate newborn babies was undertaken by Professor Deycke, director of the Lübeck General Hospital, and Dr Alstädt, chief medical officer of the Lübeck Health Department. BCG was supplied from the Pasteur Institute, Paris, but prepared for administration in the tuberculosis laboratory in Lübeck and the oral route was used. After four to six weeks a large number of the infants developed tuberculosis. Of 250 vaccinated, there were 73 deaths in the first year and another 135 were infected but recovered. The German government set up an inquiry headed by Professor Bruno Lange of the Robert Koch Institute, Berlin, and Professor Ludwig Lange of the German Ministry of Health. After 20 months their report exonerated BCG as the cause of the disaster, which they attributed to negligent contamination of the vaccine by virulent tubercle bacilli in the Lübeck laboratories. Two of the doctors concerned were given sentences of imprisonment.

As the news of the Lübeck disaster spread around the world, Calmette and Guérin (who developed the vaccine) were the objects of considerable criticism and both men came under great strain. In August 1930, at the Oslo meeting of the International Union against Tuberculosis, Calmette defended himself and received a great ovation. Though the report of the German inquiry exonerated BCG as the cause of the disaster, confidence in the vaccine had been undermined. [Source: http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3749764/]

What happened in Germany halted the development and application of BCG vaccinations for several years, effectively until after WWII, with the inevitable consequences for tuberculosis incidence. Such can be the impact of things going wrong in science, even if the 'science' itself is not to blame.

Rob Gandy
By email

Odd couple

Here is an example of inter-species friendship from 1592 – a detail from a Cornelis Van Haarlem painting called *Original Sin*, mainly featuring Adam and Eve. I reckon the cat and monkey are clinging together for comfort and thinking "Gordon Bennett, they've really gone and done it now".
Phil Baker, *London*

Sculptor's cave decapitations

Your brief report on the finds of heads of Bronze Age children displayed in the entrance to Sculptor's Cave [**FT334:16**] actually rather misrepresents the findings (you can thank the *Mail Online* for that!). My PhD research (which has been turned into a forthcoming book) was on the phenomenon of decapitation burials in archæology, so I'm well acquainted with the academic papers on the site. The original excavations in the 1930s found a quantity of human remains, including a large number of non-adult bones and also some cervical vertebræ with chop-marks, indicating decapitation. This was reported until very recently (and more recently still by the *Mail* and other media outlets) as being indicative of children being decapitated and their heads displayed in the entrance of the cave. However, more recent analyses and dating of the remains has demonstrated that there were two periods of deposition, one in the Bronze Age and probably of whole corpses, or dismembered corpses (as evidenced by a child's skull with cut-marks, suggesting possible defleshing), which did largely comprise non-adults.

However, there is no definite evidence for decapitation amongst these remains and the presence of bones from other parts of the body would seem to greatly weaken the interpretation of the display of children's heads. The second phase of activity was in the Roman period Iron Age and this is when the cervical vertebræ with decapitation blows were deposited, all but one of which are from adults. Therefore, there certainly was decapitation going on at the site but it wasn't of children and it wasn't in the Bronze Age. Interestingly, decapitated burials and deposits of decapitated heads are very common in the Roman period

letters

Hinton Ampner

The haunting of Hinton Ampner manor house has always fascinated me, ever since I read about it in *Great British Ghosts* by Aidan Chambers when I was still at junior school. I have also read a copy of the original account in *Poltergeists* by Sacheverell Sitwell and Irene Hawkins. So Roger Clarke's feature "The house that was haunted to death" [**FT309:28-32**] reignited my interest.

Recently I was able to visit it. The various guides knew a lot about the original manor house where the reported hauntings supposedly took place. According to accounts, the hauntings got so bad in the original Tudor manor house that no one would live there for long, so it was demolished in the late 18th century.

Another mystery about the original manor house is where it actually was. The guides told me that there was an archæological excavation where they thought that the original house was, but nothing was found. Someone did some research at the British Library/Museum and think that they have found the correct site. It is thought to have been where a cherry orchard is now, near the west wall of All Saints' Church (see photograph). On the extreme left of the photograph is a hedge that is in front of the well house of the original house.

The present house was built in Georgian times, a short distance from where the original house was. It has had bits done to it over the years. The guides said that even here there have been strange, unaccountable noises heard every so often. Whether they have anything to do with the haunting of the old house is anybody's guess.

Gary Stocker
By email

*Editor's note: Peter McCue inquired about the position of the original house and was shown a site not far from the church and roughly 246ft (75m) NNE of the present-day Hinton Ampner house [**FT312:68**]. This presumably tallies with the research mentioned by Gary Stocker, although Dr McCue's photograph is from a different position to the one reproduced here.*

in Britain (and much less so in the Iron Age, despite the long-held belief in the widespread Cult of the Head), so these cases are presumably part of that phenomenon, which actually seems to be very diverse, both in the ways in which the decapitation was performed and the possible reasons behind it, although execution (and occasionally human sacrifice) seems to be the predominant motivation.

Dr Katie Tucker
Department of Archaeology, University of Winchester

EmDrive anomalies

The report on 'EmDrive Anomalies' [**FT332:14**] is perhaps a little unfair in its portrayal of scientific dogmatism. The suggestion that the EmDrive must be impossible because it violates the principle of conservation of momentum is quite unsound – that an object can move itself through free space merely by internal contortions that move its momentum around has been established and accepted in the scientific community since Jack Wisdom developed the concept over 10 years ago (see http://web.mit.edu/wisdom/www/swimming.pdf, or for an easier-to-read explanation: http://www.science20.com/hammock_physicist/swimming_through_empty_space).

The gist of the concept of 'swimming in spacetime' is that in reality, space is curved by gravity, i.e. it does not exactly follow the rules of Euclidean geometry. The implication of this is that carefully arranged cyclic movements – shifting an objects' internal masses back and forth – can in fact create an imbalance in the momenta of the internal masses, in such a way as to result in a net 'translation' of the object. The speed of the translation would depend only on how quickly the internal masses were cycled.

Effectively, one can convert energy into thrust without having to exhaust any reaction mass, which is exactly what the EmDrive appears to be doing. There are no moving parts in the EmDrive, but there are moving microwaves – lots of them, moving cyclically at the speed of light. While microwaves are massless, they still possess momentum, so the same principle applies. My hunch is that devices of this sort may have hit upon a rather efficient way to apply the 'swimming' principle.

The EmDrive's inventor makes no reference to the device working by this mechanism, but then the theoretical explanations he does offer have been widely denounced as nonsensical. I am not qualified to comment on that point, but I suspect the lack of any kind of credible physical explanation of the 'anomalous thrust' is the main reason that the EmDrive is meeting with a lukewarm response from the scientific community so far.

Incidentally, the 'swimming' principle has a rather odd consequence. Normally, when a stationary (with respect to the observer) object is accelerated by a force, it will subsequently "remain in uniform motion in a straight line" unless acted upon by another force. With a 'swimming' engine by contrast, an object will keep moving as long as its 'swimming engine' is running. As soon as the engine is switched off the object will instantly revert to being stationary with respect to its starting point, just like a car on a road. This prevents violation of the principle of conservation of momentum, and also means I may have to be more muted in my criticism of 'Star Trek physics' in future.

Dr Ian I'Anson
By email

Re EMdrive: the machine might work, but not violate any laws of physics. Ernst Mach once speculated that inertia was gravity from every part of the Universe. This device might act as a shield, neutralising the pull from one side, thus allowing the pull of gravity to provide attraction and the appearance of thrust. We might better call it an EMshield, if it works, as it would allow us to tap into an existing source of energy. Ne breaking of physics would then occur.

Nick Gray
Sydney, Australia

it happened to me...

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A pavement ghost

About 15 years ago, I worked for the local authority and would come home for my lunch. One day, I had just crossed a side road and was coming up to the terrace of houses where I lived. Outside this terrace was a bus stop, and I noticed two elderly women waiting for the bus and chatting to each other. There was a clear view on each side of them: the road on one side and my low brick wall on the other. As I approached the bus stop I noticed a ragged looking youth coming up behind the women. He was dressed in what looked like grey coloured clothing and had a cap on his head. Something about him didn't seem right. He disappeared behind the women and I stopped. The women were about 10ft (3m) away from me, but the youth was nowhere to be seen. He hadn't walked out into the road. He wasn't behind the women, and he had not climbed the low brick wall onto the forecourt of our terrace.

A few days later I was going through a local history book of this area and came across a photo of two ragged lads taken early in the 20th century. The lads looked very much like the one I saw on the pavement that clear spring afternoon.

Cliff Millward
Tipton, W Midlands

Heavy footsteps

In the 1980s and early 1990s I worked in a large mental hospital in Yorkshire that dated from the 1920s. The 19 wards, called villas, held up to 30 residents each and, typically, had a large communal 'dayroom' with a kitchen, dining area and toilets on the ground floor while a dormitory ran the length and width of the building on the floor above, having bathrooms at each end. Towards the end of the 1980s efforts were being made to upgrade these buildings and make them less institutional. To facilitate building work and redecoration, one of the wards, villa 14, had been emptied of residents and furniture. As a young staff nurse, I was given the task of going back inside, after the exodus, to check that none of the mentally handicapped residents had returned and ensure the place was vacant. I began with the dormitory upstairs and checked every niche, room and cupboard, locking each behind me and making sure every window was closed. I then did the same downstairs, locking everything behind me, and once I was completely satisfied the villa was empty, I prepared to leave. It was at

I heard the rapid, heavy thump, thump, thump of running human footsteps

that moment I heard the rapid, heavy thump, thump, thump of running human footsteps across the floor of the dormitory directly above my head, going from one end of the long room to the other. I was certain there was nobody up there; I had checked most thoroughly. I hastily left the building, locking it behind me and returned a few moments later with a colleague. We went through the place with a fine toothcomb, again from top to bottom, checking and locking everything behind us. The place was empty and shut up tight, yet as we both stood in the dayroom those thumps sounded above us once more. It might have been the ancient plumbing, as my colleague hastily suggested, but we both departed the building pretty sharpish nevertheless.

John Irving
Leeds

Ice house lurker

This is an experience of mine from a few years back. I was with my father in Massey's Wood, County Dublin, on a trip to photograph the remains of an ancient Celtic wedge tomb for his history blog 'Ireland in Ruins'. Massey's Wood is an interesting place, a thick, rather picturesque forest that sits at the bottom of Montpellier Hill, the location of the Hellfire Club, the stone shell of a building that once supposedly housed the debauched members of the said club. There's a number of colourful legends associated with it, such as a priest and farmer being dragged in to meet a colossal black cat, the club members murdering a dwarf and rolling his body down the mountainside (only to be subsequently uncovered in a restaurant at the base of the mountain during renovations) and the tale of the night the Devil himself appeared and burned the club down.

My father and I took our time going through the wood. It was the middle of summer and pleasantly warm. The remains of the Massey family estate still lingers in the forest, which feels like a terribly ancient place, with a few ruined buildings and walls poking out of the ground. We decided to spend some time just looking around and eventually came across the remains of an old icehouse falling into a small river. What remained was a brick tunnel slanting towards the river, sinking into the earth but very much accessible. You could look inside and, if you were small enough (which I was not), you could probably crawl in a good way. I crouched before the hole and tried taking a look in. The one thing I distinctly remember was that I could see my breath in the air very clearly, despite it being the middle of summer. The hole was, of course, pitch black. Being a bit younger then, and a little more stupid, I called into the hole. As my father went to call me to leave, I took a last look into the hole and saw for a mere moment, in the far back, a small whitish form, barely a blob, but as I saw it, a crouching person. Thoroughly startled, I withdrew quickly and recounted my experience to my father.

This is where the colourful legends of the area come into play. That night I recounted the experience on an Internet paranormal imageboard. Someone living in my area mentioned the story about workers uncovering the skeleton in the restaurant, only in this version it was the skeleton of a deformed child, not a dwarf rolled down a mountainside. We talked about the possibility of it belonging to the Massey family, who, being local aristocrats, might very well have done away with a deformed child of theirs.

I'm not really sure what to think of the encounter now, as neither possibility, that of some horrible crouching thing or the ghost of a murdered child, is terribly appealing. Maybe it was just a slight visual hallucination and nothing more. I haven't been back since.

Sean Hill
Dublin, Ireland

STRANGE AND SENSATIONAL STORIES FROM

THE ILLUSTRATED POLICE NEWS
LAW COURTS AND WEEKLY RECORD

JAN BONDESON presents more stories from the "worst newspaper in England" – the *Illustrated Police News*.

43. LEONA DARE, THE LADY WITH THE IRON JAW

Susan Adeline Stewart was born in San Fransisco in 1854. From an early age, she showed signs of an adventurous disposition, joining forces with the acrobats Thomas and Stewart Hall, who performed as 'The Brothers Dare'. In 1871, she married Thomas Hall and changed her name to Leona Dare. Pretty and vivacious, with long dark hair, she became known as the 'Queen of the Antilles' or 'The Pride of Madrid', although there is nothing to suggest that she possessed any Spanish heritage in the first place. An immediate success in the American acrobatic world, Leona Dare performed as a trapeze artist at Nixon's Amphitheatre in New York, and later joined Joel E Warner's circus. In August 1872, she introduced a novel routine: suspended from a hot-air balloon, she lifted her husband and partner off the ground, holding his harness in her powerful jaws.

Leona went on to tour Germany and France in 1874 and 1875, becoming quite a success at the Folies Bergère. Back performing in New York, she quarrelled with her husband and left him in 1876, taking their complicated trapeze apparatus with her. This allowed her to keep performing with another partner, first in Paris and then at the Oxford Music Hall in London. But Thomas Hall tracked her down and took the theatre to court in May 1879 for illicitly using his trapeze. He read his pathetic letters to the fickle Leona aloud in court to gain sympathy. Whereas she had been paid £70 a week at the Oxford, he was now almost destitute. "£70 a week! Very good pay; a barrister would like to get that!" exclaimed the jovial Mr Justice Denman. When the miserable Hall kept on telling his sob-stories, the bonhomous judge remarked that: "This was the effect of a man teaching his wife to fly!" But in the end, Hall won his case: the trapeze would be returned to him, or £100 damages in default.

When Leona performed in Vienna, a wealthy banker named Ernest Grunebaum became besotted with her, but she turned down his offer of marriage. After she had suffered a serious back injury, she accepted her Austrian suitor, conveniently 'forgetting' that she was already married. But Leona recovered from her injury and wanted to carry on performing. When she came to Chicago in 1880, her American husband again made himself known, but she managed to divorce him and then married Grunebaum a second time. It is not known what happened to Grunebaum when Miss Leona Dare, as she styled herself, returned to perform in Europe in 1882; no newspaper made any further reference to his existence. When Leona toured Spain in 1884, she was partnered by the young French acrobat

ABOVE: 'The ascent of Leona Dare from a ballooon at the Crystal Palace', from *IPN*, 16 June 1888.

M George. On 22 November that year, they were performing at the Princess Theatre in Valencia. In her trademark *finale*, when she held the ropes for George's trapeze bar in her jaws, Leona "was seized with a nervous fit" and dropped him. Since safety nets were surplus to requirement in the Hispanic theatrical world at the time, the hapless acrobat hit the floor with a crushing impact. When the terror-struck audience stampeded, several people were trampled and injured. Leona was saved from the trapeze, but M George died from his injuries.

A disaster of this magnitude would have persuaded most acrobats to keep their feet on terra firma for the foreseeable future, but the daredevil Leona instead thought of a novel stratagem of risking life and limb. She teamed up with the Swiss balloonist Eduardo Spelterini and devised her most dangerous act yet: she would hang on to a trapeze suspended from the balloon only with her teeth, and see Europe's great capitals from a bird's eye perspective. When she came to London in May 1888 and announced her intention to ascend from the Crystal Palace, many Londoners were horrified. This was a most unladylike thing to do, and she should remember the horrid catastrophe that ensued when Mynheer de Groof, the Flying Man, had crashed to death during a similar foolhardy stunt (see **FT295:76-77**). But Leona made her ascent without complications, rising to a height of 5,000ft (1,500m) above the great crowd. She repeated the performance several times, both in London and Leicester, once nearly coming to grief when the balloon was carried off by strong winds. Leona and her two assistants went on to perform in Madrid and Paris to great acclaim. In October 1889, she was in Bucharest for her final performance together with M Spelterini.

In 1890, when the now 36-year-old Leona was back performing in Paris, she let go of the trapeze when the balloon was carried off by a gust of wind, and broke her leg. Although she recovered from her injury, she gave up performing a year or two later, and returned to the United States, ending up in Spokane, Washington. A pensioner in the early 1920s, she astounded the local newsmen by showing them her scrapbook of newspaper cuttings in many languages, telling of her past exploits. She died after a brief illness in May 1922, aged 67.

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Why Fortean?

Fortean Times is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

From the viewpoint of mainstream science, its function is elegantly stated in a line from Enid Welsford's book on the mediæval fool: "The Fool does not lead a revolt against the Law; he lures us into a region of the spirit where... the writ does not run."

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox.

FT toes no party line.

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CHARLES WILLIAMS Pt.1

HUNT EMERSON and KEVIN JACKSON

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...C.S. LEWIS...

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WHO?

WHO?

WHO?

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C.S. LEWIS WAS WILD WITH JEALOUSY...

BLAST HIS EYES!

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A RECENT BIOGRAPHY BY GREVEL LINDOP REVEALS THAT WILLIAMS WAS NOT ONLY A WRITER OF SPOOKY FANTASIES...

...BUT AN ACTUAL MAGICIAN!

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OH- SO THAT'S WHERE THE LINE CAME FROM! NO ONE EVER TOLD ME...

...AND WILLIAMS' OWN PLAY "THE DEVIL AND THE LADY"— WHICH HAS PRETTY MUCH THE SAME PLOT AS "ROSEMARY'S BABY"...

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FORTEAN TIMES 337

ON SALE 4 FEB 2016

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

It seems there was truth behind the urban legend of "The Maniac on the Platform", as described by Michael Goss in *FT*'s sister magazine, *Magonia* (19 May 1985). According to former detective Geoff Platt, convicted murderer Kiernan Kelly confessed to killing 15 people on the London Underground in the 1970s, by pushing them under trains. Kelly, described as "a violent drifter", allegedly made the confession in 1984 after strangling his cellmate William Boyd for snoring. He then confessed to murdering two other men in London in the 1970s for which he was convicted. He had already been charged with attempted murder when he allegedly pushed a man in front of a train at Kensington station in 1984 but was acquitted. The report does not say which 'Kensington station'. The number of murders varies from 18 in the *Independent* and *Daily Telegraph* and 16 in the *Daily Mirror* as well as the above 15.

Platt, 60, claims that Scotland Yard and/or "press officers working for the Government" suppressed this confession to prevent panic. Others have been on Kelly's trail. In 2014 a blog dedicated to murder cases mentions him in conjunction with tube deaths, the 'Kensington station' attempt and another at Oval station in 1953 (although, if this isn't a typo, it sounds too long ago to be Kelly's work). Platt asserts Kelly used the Northern Line for his crimes and claims to have found reports of "a number of people who jumped off the platform onto the Northern Line". Following publication of his book *The London Underground Serial Killer* last April, British Transport Police invited Platt to pass to them any relevant information, but cautioned: "Given the passage of time since [these murders] are alleged to have been committed, they would prove difficult to substantiate without further evidence."

In February 1985, a year after Kelly's supposed secret confession, Michael Goss overheard a woman discussing the maniac on the Circle Line – but the polish of the story suggested to him that the tale had been told many times before and had become shinier and easier to repeat through repetition. "The Maniac lurks on crowded Tube platforms, taking his stand just behind the front ranks of oblivious passengers who are waiting for the train. In front of him, very near the platform edge and indeed too near to recover herself if something made her lose her balance, is his chosen victim, a young woman. Then, as the train sweeps into the station, the Maniac gives her a short, abrupt but irresistibly powerful thrust in the back. She topples forward and..." The story Goss collected mentions that "the police had hushed up all details lest the publicity inspired a spate of 'copy-cat' murders."

One count against the legend being related to the alleged murders is that in the overheard discussion the victim is a woman, while Kelly's victims, real and otherwise, were all men. This could be down to the stories drifting from the reality of the story over time gaining polish and taking on a more conventional narrative of men attacking women – or the legend could be a coincidence unrelated to Kelly's possible crimes.

In any case, "the Maniac on the Platform" is no mere bad dream. On 2 December – a week ago as I [Paul Sieveking] write this – a 29-year-old man was arrested on suspicion of attempted murder after a commuter was pushed in front of a train at my local Underground station at Kentish Town in north London. The injured man was airlifted to hospital with "life-changing" injuries. *londonist.com, 29 July; Camden New Journal, 3 Dec 2015.*

A case of ostension – a legend played out in 'real life' – occurred in the Royal Cornwall Hospital in February 2011, when a patient died after her breathing machine was accidentally unplugged. Betty Rowling, 82, of Illogan, Cornwall, was hooked to the device while battling a severe infection in both lungs. An unnamed health care assistant came to check her blood pressure, but there was no spare socket to do so, so (s)he unhooked the BiPAP machine, mistaking it for the plug to the patient's bed. The assistant and two nurses tried to restart the machine, but couldn't set it up correctly, and Ms Rowling died shortly afterwards. The hospital has since installed eight extra sockets. *Sun, 6 Nov 2015.*

Suharto Dimjati, 48, died when a cow he was slaughtering in a sacrificial ceremony kicked out, making him stab his own arm. He severed an artery, suffered severe blood loss, and died on the way to hospital after the accident at a Muslim festival in Taman Cahaya Baru, a township in Johor state, Malaysia. His family said he had been proud to be given the honour of sacrificing the cow. *Metro, 1 Oct 2015.*

You're never too old to get into trouble. A man aged 95 was arrested after battering a fellow nursing home resident to death with his walking frame. He is said to have swung the metal Zimmer walker at the 88-year-old, hitting him on the head. The victim died in hospital following the incident in Sanguesa, Spain. Police said the motive was unknown. *Sun, 4 June 2015.*

It must have seemed like a horror film when Thomas Kennedy started seeing red streaks running down his kitchen walls in Midwest City, Oklahoma. His apartment appeared to be bleeding. He wiped the marks away, thinking it was a strange case of damp, but they kept coming back – so he called the police. The red stuff was indeed blood, and came from a neighbour who had fallen, hit her/his head and died, resulting in the sinister sanguinary seepage through Mr Kennedy's kitchen ceiling. *Metro, 5 June 2015.*

THE FORTEAN TIMES BOOK OF STRANGE DEATHS VOL 2

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"My writing career took off exponentially."

Another student who benefited was Hazel McHaffie. Hazel wanted to make her academic work in Medical Ethics more accessible to people, and decided to write the themes into novels. Following her Writers Bureau course, Hazel has had five novels published, and appeared at the Edinburgh International Book Festival. She also has her own website at www.hazelmchaffie.com.

Sometimes studying with The Writers Bureau takes students down new and unexpected paths. Patricia Holness originally enrolled on The Writers Bureau's Writing for Children course. However, she soon realised that what she was learning applied to other types of writing as well.

She is now a full-time writer, regularly selling short stories for both children and adults. She also has a monthly column in Devon Life.

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